A Modern Brigand

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Miss Bayle's Romance"

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'I turn my back on thy detested walls,
Proud city, and thy sons I leave behind,
A selfish, sordid, money-getting kind.'

'O money, money, how blindly thou hast been worshipped, and how stupidly abused! Thou art health and liberty and strength; and he that has thee may rattle his pockets at the Devil.'—CHARLES LAMB.

A MODERN BRIGAND.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

'MISS BAYLE'S ROMANCE.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

II.

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A MODERN BRIGAND.

CHAPTER XV.

A SON OF THE SOUTH.

'By woodland belt, by ocean bar,
The full south breeze our foreheads fann'd,
And, under many a yellow star,
We dropp'd into the Magic Land.'

LORD LYTTON: *Owen Meredith.*

'Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
Are emblems of deeds that are done in that clime;
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime?'

BYRON.

CARLO NERONE was thirty years old. He was five feet six inches in height, and slender in figure; his shoulders were too broad for symmetry, but

broad enough for strength ; he was muscular and agile, alert as a rabbit, and cunning as a fox. He weighed one hundred and thirty-seven pounds. His hair was as black as a raven's wing, and his countenance was as swarthy as that of a North American Indian. His features were regular, but not refined ; he had the look of a man possessing a determined character, and the bearing of one with whom it would be hopeless to argue and dangerous to trifle. Born in Sicily of an old but humble family, he had an experience of the world such as few Sicilians of his class had enjoyed and profited by.

Still fewer had turned their inborn shrewdness to better account. Nature had endowed Carlo Nerone with a cleverness which enabled him to make the most of his opportunities, and his knowledge of life had largely supplemented Nature's gifts. He was regarded with something like reverence by his neighbours and intimate friends. It was rumoured that he could speak French and English in addition to his mother-tongue, and rumour in this case did not lie.

The small hamlet of Nicata, on the lower slope of Mount Etna, had the honour of being Carlo Nerone's birthplace. His family was very poor, very ancient, and had long been well known to the police. All his ancestors were brigands on a small scale, and few of them had lived to be full of years and to die in their beds. When Carlo was sixteen his father ended an agitated life two months after being sentenced to imprisonment for ten years, the cause of his death being wounds received at the moment of his capture.

A garden which had been in possession of the Nerone family from time immemorial supplied enough fruit and vegetables to meet its wants, and left a surplus for sale in the small town of Nicalosi, about three miles distant. The garden was cultivated at irregular intervals, as the principal members of the family devoted most of their time to lying in wait for travellers and disburdening them of their portable property.

The active members of the Nerone family

and their associates were popular in the neighbourhood. They confined themselves to robbing strangers, and they were so thoughtful and considerate as to guarantee the poorer people in the vicinity from plunder by rival brigands, on condition of receiving a moderate annual payment in advance. They found, as Rob Roy did, that it was a mistake to be too exacting or merciless. The moderate black-mail which they levied was paid with greater readiness and punctuality than the rents of many an Irish or English landlord. It is true the sums were not large, the average amount being five lire, a very few being as high as twenty.

The payments were punctually made twice a year. The Nerone family never pressed for the black-mail in money if the peasants alleged they had none; in that case payments were generously accepted in kind, and the quantity of eggs, butter, or vegetables which was given instead of cash often far exceeded the cash sum in actual value. Habit had made this exaction appear

as natural to the peasants as any impost levied by the Commune or the State, the result being that, when Carlo's father was sent to prison and died there, the payments were continued to his widow, who was thus enabled to rear her family of two sons and one daughter. Carlo was sixteen at that time ; his younger brother, Eduardo, was fifteen, and his sister, Lucilla, was twelve.

This interesting family had a severe struggle for existence ; nevertheless, all the members of it managed to survive, and the eldest son duly entered the army at the age when he was compelled to serve as a soldier. Like all his ancestors, he could neither read nor write. Indeed, none of the inhabitants of Nicata, except the priest, had acquired either accomplishment. Partly on this account they regarded the priest with profound respect. The National Schools which now abound in Sicily did not then exist. Compulsory service in the Italian army has an advantage and an effect which are generally overlooked. The soldiers who cannot read or write are taught to do both before the

end of their term of service. Moreover, they are taught something about their own country. Carlo learned, as a soldier, that Sicily was much smaller than Italy, and that Italy was not the world. Before leaving his native island, it was the world to him.

The Italian army has helped to render Italy a united kingdom in a double sense, and the more important service of the two which it has performed is that of practically teaching the Italians to understand each other. A result has followed resembling that which was the consequence of Pitt's policy after the last rebellion in Scotland. Till then, the Highland chieftains were the all-powerful lords and masters whom Sir Walter Scott has depicted, and the favourite pursuit of their followers was fighting. The abolition of the heritable jurisdictions deprived the chiefs of their positions of authority and their followers of employment. To the astonishment of his contemporaries, Pitt enlisted the wild Highlanders in the army of the King; he sought for merit, as he

said, 'wherever it was to be found. It is my boast that I was the first Minister who looked for it, and I found it in the mountains of the north;' in other words, he enlisted the rebels in the ranks of the royal army, and thus converted them into the trustworthy servants of his sovereign, 'who served with fidelity as they fought with valour.' To the Highlanders themselves, their military training and discipline constituted a kind of liberal education. They retained their courage whilst losing their savage habits, and no regiments have better upheld the honour and renown of the national flag than those which were raised in that corner of the British Isles which was once the theatre of ruffianism and rebellion.

The Highlander of a century and a half ago, who came to London as one of King George's soldiers, did not experience a greater change than Carlo Nerone did when, as a soldier, he was quartered in Florence, Turin, or Rome. He had a difficulty in understanding the common speech of many of his comrades; the dialect spoken in Pied-

mont differing far more widely from that spoken in Sicily than the peasants' speech at John O'Groat's House does from that at the Land's End. As a result of the school-teaching in the army, the natives of the various parts of Italy all learn to speak a form of Italian which approximates to that of Tuscany, so that the power of understanding others, and of making himself understood in all parts of the country, is one of the gains of the soldier who is discharged from the army which he entered without speaking or understanding any other tongue than his rude native dialect.

Carlo Nerone did not return home when his three years' term of service expired. His conduct had been exemplary, and he was offered a subordinate place in the Customs' department, which he accepted—partly because the pay seemed to him so high that he might be able to save something out of it to send to his mother, and partly because he had acquired a taste for seeing the world. He was sent to Ventimiglia, on the frontier between Italy and France, where he re-

mained two years ; and where, being brought into constant communication with the French, he learned to speak their language fluently and to read it easily. Since his curiosity had been excited by education, he beguiled his leisure with books and newspapers ; the consequence of his reading being to make him feel a new man, and to open a wide horizon before his eyes.

Having once tasted the joy of change and novelty, he became restless, and an opportunity occurring, he went to Marseilles after applying for and obtaining his discharge. At Marseilles, he obtained employment as hotel porter in a house which was chiefly frequented by Italians. He made the acquaintance of other hotel porters, and from them he learned that even better openings were to be found in Paris and London. Proceeding to Paris, he learned that his ignorance of English was a drawback to employment in a hotel of the better class, and then he resolved to go to London in order to acquire it. He spent three years in London as a waiter in some of the Italian hotels and

restaurants which abound there. In one of them, where he got a situation after he had picked up a little English, he was brought into contact with English and Americans, by whom it was largely patronized, and his knowledge of the language increased so much with frequent practice that he became able to express himself nearly as fluently and correctly in English as in good Italian.

Carlo's younger brother, having also served his three years in the army, joined him in London, and he, too, made rapid progress in the English language. But Eduardo was less enterprising and ambitious than Carlo, the latter having no intention of passing his days as a waiter. He was anxious to become keeper of a hotel or restaurant; but he lacked the necessary capital. He was saving in the extreme; still, as he remitted half his earnings to his mother, the sum which he put aside was not large.

Having perused many books and newspapers, he had learned much from them which was entertaining and unprofitable.

The Italian, the French, and the English newspapers taught him that many persons in Italy, France, and England are guilty of robbery and murder, and this was a fresh and an unpleasant form of knowledge. Till he left his native Sicily, he thought that people were good upon the whole, and that crimes were comparatively rare. Of course he did not class brigands amongst criminals; as a member of the oldest family of brigands in existence, one which flourished before the ancestors of the greatest nobles in England, France, and Italy had emerged from the common herd, he naturally gloried in it and its exploits, and as naturally he saw no harm in either. A pickpocket or a murderer he regarded with detestation. That his father should have been apprehended and cast into prison was, in his eyes, a misfortune equivalent to that of the soldier who is taken prisoner and who dies in captivity. He regarded brigands and the police as enemies, who constantly waged war with each other, and if he had not been too young at the death of his father, he would have instantly taken his

place and carried on the campaign. He considered brigandage to be an honourable industry, which was both misunderstood and underrated. In his opinion killing was no murder when performed by a brigand.

Accident threw in Carlo Nerone's way a small book by the late Edmond About. He found it on a table in the restaurant of a French hotel where he was a waiter, immediately after a customer had eaten his dinner, paid the price, and left the room. He followed him into the street with the book, and he was told that he might keep it. Taking it to his room he read it at his leisure. Its title was *Le Roi des Montagnes* that is, 'The King of the Mountains.'

It is scarcely necessary to say that in this book, as in another one, Edmond About dealt out hard measure to the Greeks, and, perhaps, it is a misfortune that his humorous exaggerations have been taken too seriously by the Greeks themselves. However, this is not the place for a criticism upon About and his writings. They have served their purpose and had their day.

Carlo was delighted with Hadgi Stavros, 'The King of the Mountains.' In his eyes Hadgi Stavros was a sensible and enterprising brigand who had moved with the age. He kept an account at a London bank; he speculated on the Stock Exchange, and he was thoroughly civilized in the way he dealt with his money. Carlo rose from the perusal of the book with a number of novel ideas in his head. He felt that the time had arrived for organizing brigandage on new lines and an extensive scale, and that he was the man for the task.

Till reading *The King of the Mountains*, Carlo had some doubts as to the course he should follow. His mind was now made up. He had received news from Nicata to the effect that his mother was dangerously ill, that she was not likely to live long, and that she wished to see him before she died. He also heard that Caterina Colla, to whom he had plighted his troth before leaving to serve in the army, was anxious to know if he meant to return. As neither his mother nor his betrothed could write, and as their

friends and neighbours were unable to do so, the parish priest had been requested to convey this information to him. He replied to the effect that he hoped to return soon, and he sent a special message to Caterina, assuring her of his continued fidelity and affection, and that she would not have much longer to wait for him.

Indeed, Carlo had only remained away so many years with the view of saving money. By dint of great economy and self-denial, he had accumulated three hundred pounds, and whilst so doing, he had remitted enough to his mother to enable her to live in comparative comfort. She stood the more in need of her son's help, as she had grown too infirm to work in the garden, and also because the peasants in the neighbourhood had ceased one by one to pay the black-mail, which had been to her a sort of outdoor relief. The younger peasants had less respect than their conservative sires for the good old customs ; besides, as they were no longer tormented by brigands, they saw no reason for paying black-mail.

The refined and mild kind of brigandage, which consists in keeping a hotel in those parts of the Continent to which strangers resort in summer and winter, had many attractions for Carlo. He had learned all the tricks of the trade. But youthful memories, to say nothing of inherited tastes and aptitudes, proved too powerful, and after reading and pondering the story of *The King of the Mountains*, he decided to adhere to the family calling. Being more intelligent, and far better educated than his predecessors, he contemplated making some innovations in the conduct of affairs. What chiefly excited his ambition was to reconstitute brigandage throughout Italy, and to render it a safer if a less lucrative career. He had a vein of philanthropy in his nature, and the hard lot of some of his fellow-men, and of the brigands who had retired from business in particular, gave him much concern, and led him to form a plan to which he proceeded to give effect.

In no part of Italy, outside of Sicily, has brigandage become, in American phrase, so

much of an 'institution' as in Calabria, and in that part of the country none had achieved greater renown or had a longer career than the venerable Bardolo. To have been one of Bardolo's band was accounted an honourable distinction. He played a part amidst the mountains of Calabria as famous and uncontested as that played by Hadgi Stavros amidst the mountains of Greece.

Bardolo was a prudent as well as a very famous brigand; he had attained the ripe age of seventy without ever falling into the hands of justice. Most of his followers were acquainted with the inside of a prison, but he had never even seen the outside of one. He had lived a secluded life from his youth up. He had no desire to roam or leave the comfortless habitation near the summit of Mount Morati wherein he first saw the light, and where he expected to end his days. His followers accounted it a favour to do his bidding, and a still greater one to be admitted to his presence.

This venerable and astute brigand was brave to the utmost limits of discretion.

Very few persons could charge him with being present when a traveller was rifled and robbed of his money and valuables, or of personally mutilating one for whom a ransom was asked, and asked in vain. All these unpleasant and compromising details he left to his subordinates. He preferred issuing orders and hoarding booty. He was a widower, but not a disconsolate one. His wife died soon after giving birth to a son, and he did not regret her decease, as she had nagged him without ceasing whilst she lived. He discouraged marriage amongst his followers, holding that brigands, like priests, should devote themselves body and soul to their arduous and profitable calling.

All the hopes and affections of the aged Bardolo were concentrated upon his son, who was in the prime of life, and to whom the leadership of the band had been entrusted for several years. Luigi Bardolo was the worthy son of his father ; but being more venturesome, he had once been captured by the police. This was due to his rashness, and to a curiosity which sometimes leads

men as well as women astray. He had visited Naples in company with a brother brigand, and entered a *café* there. One of the customers had been seized and rifled by some of Bardolo's followers a few weeks previously, and he recognised Luigi at a glance. A message was sent to the police, and Luigi was ignominiously overpowered before having had time to draw his knife, and enjoy the satisfaction of stabbing somebody previously to being overpowered.

When his capture occurred, a Neapolitan banker was in Bardolo's clutches. Luigi's companion escaped whilst the police were occupied in manacling Luigi, and he hastened to bear the sorrowful tidings to his revered and aged chief. A message reached the banker's friends soon afterwards, to the effect that, if Luigi were instantly set free, the banker would be allowed to return home without paying a ransom, and these terms being agreed upon, Luigi revisited his mountain home. The police had arranged to recapture Luigi after the banker's safety was assured, but the plan miscarried, as the

brigands were on their guard, and proved to be far the sharper of the two.

The spot on Mount Morati, where Bardolo dwelt in dignified seclusion, was well known by repute to Carlo Nerone. He had heard his father describe it; indeed, one of his earliest recollections was a story told by his esteemed father of a visit which he paid to Bardolo, and of a promise made to him by the kind and respected brigand. It was to the effect that he would always be delighted to welcome either of Nerone's two sons, and give him good advice. He had stipulated, both to prevent mistakes and also as a means of identification, that when either of the sons paid the visit and was asked his name, he was to reply Carlo or Eduardo Nicata.

It was on the afternoon of a beautiful day in the early summer that Carlo Nerone walked along the picturesque valley leading to Mount Morati. This valley was a favourite place of resort for adventurous tourists, who explored it to admire the scenery. It was one of several hunting-

grounds of Bardolo's band, who went there to capture the delighted sight-seers. One of Bardolo's wise maxims ran thus: 'Never render any one place a constant terror to strangers and travellers. The place which gets a bad name is little frequented.' He considered it right, in his own interest, that strangers and travellers should sometimes enjoy the benefit of a close time. Thus no brigands belonging to Bardolo's band were seen for months together in a locality which, during certain periods, was infested with them. As soon as it was spread about that the brigands had disappeared, the strangers and travellers returned in shoals to the places which they had shunned.

The lovely valley through which Carlo Nerone now walked happened to be a resort for brigands at the time of his visit, and he had been warned not to enter it. As he wished to meet them, he expressed himself obliged for the hint, and added that, so far from fearing brigands, he was desirous of making their acquaintance. He was regarded by the hotel-keeper and the hotel-porter to

whom he said this as a presumptuous and foolish man, for whom Providence and brigands had a punishment in store.

At a turning in the road, where the view was lovely, Carlo stopped to admire the enchanting prospect. He was not qualified to look upon Nature with an artist's eye; on the contrary, he had been trained to regard natural scenery from the brigand's point of view, just as a sportsman contemplates a Highland moor not in order to admire the tints of the heather, or the effects of light and shade when the shadows of the clouds sweep over its surface, but with the view of estimating the probabilities of its abounding in game. The present glimpse of the valley reminded Carlo of a corresponding spot near Nicata, and therefore the scene gladdened his sight; moreover, there was a spring of water at the road-side, resembling one near his father's house. Being very thirsty, he stopped, and bent his head to drink.

On raising his head, he was startled to see several long gun-barrels gleaming in the sunshine through the bushes on either side,

and pointed towards him. He involuntarily ducked and turned to run, when several bullets whistled past his ear. Italian brigands are bad marksmen; they can handle knives more skilfully than rifles. Carlo's foot struck against a stone, and he fell on his face, after running a few paces. Whilst lying helpless on the ground he was surrounded by five men, each of whom seized some part of his person. Not a word was spoken till one of the five said:

'Bring him along.'

The others raised him up and dragged him after them.

Carlo was too much taken by surprise to know at the moment what to do or say. He had made up his mind to meet brigands, and to make friends with them; but he was as unprepared for capture as he was for sudden death. He had often been present in his youth when his father's followers treated the lonely traveller as he had been treated; but this experience profited him nothing. An onlooker never really understands the rigour of the game. The greatest counsel

often makes the worst witness in a court of law. He feels himself in a false position when in the witness-box, and he does not relish the torment which he had repeatedly taken pleasure in inflicting upon reluctant and timid witnesses. In like manner a brigand cannot thoroughly enjoy playing the part of the inoffensive and unarmed traveller. It is both novel and puzzling to him. He feels like an actor who has not rehearsed his part. Carlo's first impulse was to protest in strong language; happily he did not commit this mistake. Brigands do not suffer their captives to open their mouths without permission; besides, they fear lest their captives may cry aloud, attract the notice of the passers-by, and be rescued. One of the four men who dragged Carlo along, rapidly tied a handkerchief over his mouth the moment he perceived that he was about to open it and say something.

If Carlo had been allowed to walk alone, he would have had no difficulty in traversing the narrow and stony path up which he was taken. The path was the bed of a mountain

torrent, in which there was no water. Every time he tripped over a stone he received a tug or a blow, as a hint not to do so again, just as a poor horse is lashed whenever he stumbles. Never, till then, had Carlo regarded brigands as inconsiderate and cruel men, and never did he forget the tortures to which he was subjected whilst journeying towards Bardolo's abode. If the punishment had lasted much longer, he might have grown ashamed of his ancestors, and felt scruples about pursuing their calling. Certainly, he saw brigands from a new point of view. He felt doubtful whether ancestral brigandage were really a much more creditable occupation than keeping a hotel. Personal experience, if unpleasant, often plays havoc with the finest and most cherished principles.

It was nightfall when the party reached their camping-ground, a spot on a slope below the plateau whereon Bardolo kept house. This venerable brigand, who was thoroughly conservative in his views and regular in his habits, adhered to a rule never

to transact business after sunset. Accordingly the prisoner could not be taken before him until the morning.

Carlo Nerone was hungrier than he had been since his boyhood, when he never could get enough to eat, or when what he got was not to his liking. His hands were tied behind his back; his mouth was still closed with a handkerchief, so he could not indicate by word or sign how greatly he longed for something wherewith to stay his stomach. Moreover, he had the mortification of seeing his captors sit, or rather squat, down to partake their evening meal of polenta and dried fish, and appear to enjoy it. Their appetites were as keen as his. One of them observed the eager and wolfish look which he cast upon the simple and indigestible fare, and said to the others:

'Give the prisoner something; he seems dying of hunger. And the Master'—for so they styled Bardolo—'is always sorry if a prisoner is starved the first night. He may never have another meal.'

The others agreed to give him food, in order

that Bardolo's humane rule, that a captive should not be done to death fasting, might be strictly observed. Before feeding him they determined that, unless he signified by a gesture he would not speak after the removal of the handkerchief, he was to be left to starve. He understood their speech, and one of them said in the best Italian he could command:

'The signor will be fed if he bows his head in token that he will not utter a word,' and added an expressive pantomime to the same effect, with the addition of a sign that if he did speak his throat would be cut. Carlo at once bowed his head with all the emphasis at his command. The handkerchief was then unfastened, and one of the brigands thrust portions of polenta and dried fish into his mouth. They would not unbind his hands in case he might give them further trouble. As soon as he shook his head in token that he could not eat any more, the handkerchief was replaced, and he had the satisfaction of lying in an uncomfortable position and listening to his captors' stories, whilst smoking their pipes. He gathered from their artless

talk that he was taken for an Englishman. This was owing to his having bought a tourist suit of the heather-mixture pattern in London, and worn it since then. His captors speculated how much ransom their revered leader would exact, and whether, in the event of none being forthcoming, he would order the prisoner to be instantly thrown over the precipice or slowly dismembered by way of giving the younger men practice in cutting up a captive. He was disgusted at their vindictiveness. Had he been apprehensive of becoming a victim, he would have been terrified. As it was he was struck with the simplicity of getting rid of unremunerative captives by casting them over a precipice. He made a mental note of this for future guidance, the method being quite new to him. He thought it both judicious and practical, as the supposition might be entertained, when the captive's corpse was discovered, that his death was due to an accident.

Carlo passed a weary and uncomfortable, but not an anxious, night. He rejoiced when the morning broke, and he was ushered into

the presence of the Master. His hands were still tied behind his back; but, when the handkerchief was removed from his mouth, he at once exclaimed, on seeing Bardolo:

'Honoured and illustrious Master, I am Carlo Nicata; I pray you to order your sons to untie my hands.'

His sons, as Bardolo affectionately styled his followers, did not wait for a command. They recognised by Carlo's speech that he was not an Englishman; they inferred from his manner that he was no stranger to their chief, and they trembled for their mistake. Speaking slowly, Bardolo said:

'Do I see before me a son of the honoured Nerone?' And then, crossing himself, he piously added, 'May the Holy Virgin take pity on his soul!'

'Yes, master; the great Nerone was my father.' Crossing himself in turn, Carlo added, 'Mother of God, have mercy upon him!'

The old brigand and the deceased brigand's son were now alone; Bardolo's followers had vanished, dreading what he might do in his

wrath, and fearing lest he should order one of them to be cast over the precipice, as his custom was when his anger was kindled. Happily for their sakes, his son, Luigi, was their leader, and the brunt of their chief's anger would fall harmless upon him. Though Carlo was comparatively inexperienced as a brigand, he yet knew enough of the customs of the craft to be equal to the emergency; so, before engaging in further talk, he begged forgiveness for those who had taken him captive, and he pleaded that they had only been guilty of excessive, but not reprehensible, zeal. Nor did he make any complaint about his treatment, as he recognised, though against the grain, that his captors had only done their duty. When two men fight a duel and one is wounded, both are disposed to shake hands to display their good feeling, but this touching token of restored friendship does not materially abate the physical sufferings of the wounded man. Carlo's captors were quite ready to forgive him for not being their lawful prey, but he remained unreconciled to having been taken

for some one else and made to suffer severely owing to a misapprehension.

Carlo Nerone spent the day with the worthy Bardolo, and was feasted with the best that Bardolo's cave, or rather, his hut, contained. He was escorted on his way back by the great chief's admiring followers, who were now anxious to make all the atonement in their power, and who loudly expressed their sorrow at the unfortunate accident, shedding many tears and kissing Carlo most affectionately at parting. Carlo's visit was not only an unpleasant piece of personal experience, but it was made in vain.

It would be a waste of space to fill it with a detailed account of the interview between Carlo and Bardolo. Carlo's notion was to induce Bardolo to assent to a scheme for placing brigandage upon a new and entirely modern footing. He had learned that, when great capitalists wish to make money on a large scale and with more thorough disregard than they usually venture to display for the precepts of morality and the traditions of fair dealing, they form

a syndicate, and he thought that, if the brigands of Sicily entered into a syndicate, they, too, might do business on a grander scale and with very profitable results. He fancied that the shares in such a company would yield large dividends, and that they would be eagerly subscribed by investors who do not mind running a slight risk in the hope of reaping enormous profits.

Bardolo confessed that he was too old to understand or care for novelties ; that he gave much of his time to preparing for another world, and that he was too full of penitence for crimes which he had refrained from committing to be ready to introduce sweeping reforms in established practice.

He enjoyed getting money on the old and simple plan which he had learned as a boy, and of taking care of it by concealing it in a hole in the ground, or in the rock. He knew nothing about shares, nor could he comprehend what was meant by dividends. Still he listened patiently to all that Carlo urged in favour of his *Brigand's Syndicate,* and before Carlo's departure he gave him the following

good advice, which was based upon the matured experience of a long life which had been laboriously spent in the regular exercise of brigandage:

'Remember, my son, never to miss a chance. When you are as old as I am, you will see how foolish it was to be over-considerate and disposed to think that, if you let a person off without ransom, you would be more fortunate another time. The other time may never arrive. Oh! if I had only insisted upon my rights in all cases, and sent everyone over the precipice who could not, or would not, pay me a proper sum, I should be richer and happier now! But regrets are vain; therefore I advise you never to give yourself any grounds for regret. Your syndicate may be made very profitable, but I shall leave that matter to Luigi. He may understand it, and when he succeeds me, which may be very soon, as I am getting feeble, you may come to an arrangement with him, which may benefit all my children, and our dear country. Go, then, in peace, my son, and take an old man's blessing with you.'

Carlo Nerone was deeply moved. He knelt with the intention of kissing Bardolo's hand, but the worthy old brigand raised him up, and kissed him on both cheeks. Though thwarted in his project of founding a syndicate, Carlo was gratified with the latter part of his visit. He vowed never to forget the counsel of the venerable Bardolo, and to avoid burdening his conscience with neglected opportunities, and showing mercy through weakness.

He turned his back upon Mount Morati, inspired with an ambition to prove himself worthy of his race and training, and to maintain untarnished the honour of his family, and the splendour of its traditions. It is always gratifying to see the scion of an old historic house fully conscious of the responsibility which he has inherited. Carlo Nerone was not perfect, yet he was imbued with the filial piety which atones for many shortcomings, and with the desire to excel in his ancestral vocation, which is a virtue that generally commands respect.

CHAPTER XVI.

CARLO IN NICATA.

'All the comforts of life in a tavern are known
'Tis his home who possesses not one of his own;
And to him who has rather too much of that one,
'Tis the house of a friend where he's welcome to run;
The instant you enter my door you're my lord,
With whose taste and whose pleasure I'm proud to accord;
And the louder you call, and the longer you stay,
The more I am happy to serve and obey.'

CRABBE.

THERE is no place like home, especially when one is far away from it, or cannot return. When some Esquimaux were brought to Europe, they pined for their icebergs and snow-houses, their walrus and seal hunts, and their delicious meals of blubber. Indians and Africans do

not consider the green fields and trees of England, adequate compensations for the broiling heat of their homes, whilst Englishmen who have withered for a time under a blazing sun at the Antipodes, or in the Tropics, account a London fog a most delightful break in the monotony of existence. Londoners, on the other hand, would prefer a little more sunshine, but they, like other people, generally get the least of what they like the best. During Carlo Nerone's stay in France and England, the charms of his native Nicata haunted his waking and sleeping hours. He saw no spot which had so many attractions for him. On returning to it, he found drawbacks there which he had not noticed before. He rubbed his eyes, and exclaimed,

'Can this be the place which I left a few years ago?'

The small hamlet consisted of a few humble cottages, scattered over a considerable area. Large blocks of lava hindered the inhabitants from ranging their abodes in regular order. A small water-course, which was almost dry during the greater part of the year, divided

the hamlet into two parts; the bed of the stream formed a double curve, so that the house at the upper end was not visible, as one entered the opposite extremity of what was called the principal street. In this house, or hovel, the Nerone family had lived for centuries.

Though the principal person in Nicata, Carlo's house resembled the cottages of the poorer peasants, who had paid black-mail; it contained three rooms on the ground-floor, and the upper part, to which access was gained by means of a ladder, was the one where the members of the family slept, the beds being separated by curtains. Since her illness, Carlo's mother had a bed made for her in the room on the ground-floor which was set apart for visitors, and which, at other times, was occupied by the master of the house. When Carlo had to mount to the attic with the rest, he looked back with regret to the barrack which he thought so dreary when he was a soldier, and to the small rooms in the hotels and restaurants of France and England, which he had occupied

when a waiter. His home comforts were privations, when compared with what he had grown accustomed to.

Carlo's mother did not live many days after her son's arrival. She brightened up at her first interview with him, and she seemed as if she would be soon able to leave her bed again, but her revival was only the last flicker of life's taper, and within a week after welcoming her favourite son, she was carried to her last resting-place. Carlo's sister had been married to Pietro, the son of his father's oldest and most trusted comrade, so that, after his mother's death, Carlo had the house all to himself.

His mother felt, and expressed, intense delight, when she learned that her son had resolved to resume and continue the family calling.

'My darling boy,' she said, 'I hope to live and see you walking in your father's steps; the place does not seem the same since his death; there is no longer any excitement, but you'll change all that, won't you, my Carlo?'

'Yes, dearest mother, I shall do my best

for the honour of our family. I once thought of taking a hotel or restaurant, which is a little in the same line as ours, but since I am back again I feel a longing for the old trade. Perhaps I may manage to combine the two.'

'Surely, Carlo, you could never think of being anything but a brigand! I was often afraid of it, but now I shall die happy in thinking that you will prove a worthy son of your dear father.'

'But, dearest mother, there is much more of the brigand in hotel and restaurant-keepers than you suppose. It is the form which is different.'

'Well, my own son, I am too old to understand these things. It is enough for me that you take the right course at last. Oh, if I could only live to see you as much feared as your dear father was!'

'Do not fret, dearest mother, you will live to nurse my children yet. Caterina Colla is quite ready to marry me, and as soon as you can leave your bed, the wedding will take place.'

The death of his mother caused the wed-

ding to be postponed for a few weeks. It was then celebrated, at the express desire of Caterina, who was tired of waiting, whilst Carlo did not object to gratify her.

The wedding brought together a larger concourse of neighbours than the funeral. It was known, besides, that Carlo was organizing his band, and this gratified his elder neighbours, who had missed the brigandage, which helped, as they said, to circulate money. After the ceremony, many shouts were raised in honour of Carlo, the noble and grand young brigand. He thanked his friends, and promised to do his utmost to merit their good wishes.

He found it a hard task to restore the state of things which had ceased at his father's death. Some of the peasants were reluctant to pay him black-mail ; they were inoculated with new and revolutionary ideas ; they even spoke of appealing to the police for protection. This conduct was strongly reprobated and censured by the older and more conservative peasants, who entertained more respect for brigands than for policemen, and who were

sticklers for preserving and walking in the old-fashioned and ancient ways. Public opinion made itself felt through the medium of what is the Sicilian equivalent for 'boycotting'; the peasants who hesitated about paying black-mail, soon changed their minds, and tendered it to Carlo, who expressed both his thanks and his satisfaction at being spared resorting to extreme measures.

Carlo Nerone was a humane and considerate brigand, who preferred moral suasion to force, when the gentler method served his purpose as effectually as the harsher. When he did resort to physical force, the victim usually lost his life as a fitting penalty for his obstinacy.

He had determined never to kill a captive, unless it were absolutely necessary to show beyond all possibility of doubt that he was not a man to be trifled with; yet, even then, he was careful to act by proxy. He had no personal objection to inflicting pain, or taking life, but he nervously shrank from being found out, and subjected to imprisonment for murder.

In former days the brigands of Nicata

preyed upon their countrymen, who ventured to pass it unarmed. It was then near a highway or rather a path, over which there was much traffic. Of late years other roads have superseded this one, and the number of travellers who pass near Nicata has diminished by three-fourths. Moreover, since the death of Carlo's father, the Sicilian police exercised a much stricter supervision than they did during his lifetime, and they were rigorous in avenging the capture of a native Sicilian, more especially if he belonged to the *Maffia*, a secret society which has largely contributed to substitute an unwritten code of injustice for the law of the land.

If a stranger from any part of the world fell into the hands of brigands at Nicata he or she received little sympathy and no redress. The prevailing sentiment was that strangers deserved whatever fate might befall them. The Englishman or the American on his travels is not a popular person in the remote and ruder districts of Italy and Sicily. He is regarded as a bird of passage who has come to be plucked.

Now Carlo did not wish to quarrel with the constituted authorities of his native island. He dreaded meeting at their hands the treatment which caused his father's premature end. He was enrolled in the ranks of the *Maffia*, and thus he could do much mischief with impunity. He thought it safer and more profitable as a brigand to count upon strangers for patronage and support, than to run greater risks by plundering his countrymen. Besides, he had learned how to deal with the English and the Americans, and he felt sure that they would yield more profitable spoil and give him far less trouble than his poorer and less submissive fellow-countrymen.

He devoted the three hundred pounds which he had brought from England to improving his house and making it fit for the reception and entertainment of travellers. It had no resemblance to a brigand's cave. A less enlightened brigand, such as the venerable Bardolo, would not have felt at home in it. The upper part was converted into rooms, separated from each other by wooden parti-

tions, and the ladder which led to it was superseded by a rude and rather steep stair. A sign-board was placed over the door, on which large letters conveyed the information that the house had become the *Hôtel des Étrangers.*

A hotel without customers is not more useful or remunerative than a cart without a horse. It is sometimes easier to buy a horse than get custom; yet what an expenditure of money does in the one case an expenditure in the form of advertising may effect in the other. Carlo Nerone had learned during his travels the uses of advertising, and he now turned his knowledge to account. An advertisement appeared in English and American guide-books and newspapers to the effect that the *Hôtel des Étrangers* had been opened at Nicata, the most picturesque and most salubrious spot in Sicily, and the one best fitted for beginning the ascent of Mount Etna; that arrangements could be made for being boarded there at from five lire a day and upwards, and that Carlo Nerone, the proprietor, could speak 'the English perfectly

and with fluency.' He spoke English better than he wrote it.

Shortly after this hotel was opened the proprietor had an unexpected piece of good luck. An American journalist, who wished to ascend Mount Etna, visited Nicata, saw Carlo, and was provided by him with a guide. As his band of brigands was not completely formed and trained, he did not treat the stranger as a captive ; on the contrary, he gave him the best fare in the house and let him depart after charging a very small sum for his entertainment. This visitor not only recounted his experience in the journal with which he was connected, but he also sent a few lines to the London *Morning Paper*, giving an account of his experience. His letter was copied into other journals, and the multitude of idlers of both sexes on the look-out for some place where living is cheap and the life is new, made further inquiries about Nicata.

The first arrival after the journalist was Miss Snoswell, an English spinster of ripe age, wide experience, and exacting tastes.

She was accompanied by a dog. In England and in America also, there is a large surplus of spinsters who do not spread pleasure wherever they go, and who are always going somewhere. Each is as restless and unamiable as the wandering Jew. She appears to be the victim of a hidden sorrow, and she victimises others out of revenge. One of them is always to be found tormenting her neighbours and entertainers in the most unlikely places, and no corner of Europe or America is an asylum where her presence is unknown. If a few of these peripatetic females had been sent to plague Pharaoh he would have immediately consented to let the Israelites go, provided they went with them.

When Miss Snoswell arrived at Nicata and had an interview with the landlord of the *Hôtel des Étrangers*, she agreed to pay five lire a day for her board and lodging. She was called upon to pay a month's board in advance. After some hesitation and a vain attempt to persuade Carlo to modify his terms, she paid the money and prepared for a month's sojourn amidst novel scenery.

Miss Snoswell was fond of botanizing, and she took great interest in investigating the flora around Nicata. She considered the fare in the *Hôtel des Étrangers* simpler than she liked ; but, as the landlord promised to improve it, she patiently awaited the result. On the evening of the third day of her sojourn, she was returning to the hotel with a number of plants for her herbarium, which she had collected during her walk, when she saw three armed men at the corner of the road ; her dog barked at them in passing, whilst she quickened her pace, and was breathless on reaching the hotel. She had too much sense and strength of mind to faint ; but she could not repress a great fear.

'Can these be brigands ?' she said to herself, as she shook like an aspen.

Carlo was absent, and his wife could not speak English, or understand Miss Snoswell's Italian. The wandering spinsters who discredit their sex, have a great capacity for speaking foreign tongues badly, and they are always complaining of being insulted when their gibberish is not understood.

Miss Snoswell awaited Carlo's return with anxiety and impatience. As soon as he appeared she rushed forward, saying :

'Mr. Nerone, can these men be brigands whom I saw ?'

'What men, Miss Snoswell?' was his inquiry.

'Why, these men with guns, daggers, and tall hats with feathers in them, whom I passed at the turning of the road before getting here !'

'I saw them, too, and that is why I have come back sooner than I intended. I think they are brigands ; if so, we must prepare for the worst.'

'Oh, Mr. Nerone, do let me get away at once. I cannot sleep here another night.'

Carlo Nerone procured someone to carry Miss Snoswell's luggage, which was neither large nor heavy, as far as Nicolosi. He never saw her again. He had received payment for a month, at the rate of five lire a day ; she had stayed three days in his house, and by her leaving precipitately, he was largely the gainer.

Other visitors stayed longer at the *Hôtel*

des Étrangers than Miss Snoswell, and, in some cases, the brigands, of whom Pietro, Giovanni, Gregorio, and Enrico were the most active, had to do more than merely show themselves; however, the invariable result was to cause the departure of visitors before the time had expired for which they had paid their board and lodging in advance. Some of them spread the report that Nicata swarmed with brigands, and letters to that effect appeared in English newspapers. Paragraphs denying this appeared in some Italian papers. As no Italian had been captured and robbed, the Italians held that the foreigners were calumniating their country by inventing and spreading false reports about brigandage.

Carlo Nerone was equal to the occasion. He collected the paragraphs out of the Italian papers, and sent them, with a few lines written in intelligible, though not correct, English, to *The Morning Paper*, with an appeal to the editor's sense of fair play, which led to their insertion. Thus Carlo dispelled all rumours about brigands haunting Nicata, and got an excellent advertisement for his

hotel there. On the whole he prospered; but he was not content with amassing money slowly. He longed to make a great hit. He was impatient to be rich.

Sad accidents occurred near Nicata, which were regarded as inexplicable. Several persons who went there never re-appeared. The explanation given was that they had been foolhardy; had tried to ascend Mount Etna without guides, and had perished on the way down. As a matter of fact, there is no difficulty in making the ascent of Mount Etna without a guide, but persons living near it refuse to admit this. In one case, suspicions were aroused by the presentation, at the office of Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani, bankers in Catania, of several circular notes, for ten pounds each, issued by the London and Westminster Bank. These notes had been obtained from the Temple Bar branch of the bank, by Mr. J. Sutton Smith, barrister, before his departure from London at the beginning of the long vacation. It was known that he had reached Sicily, that he had expressed his determination to ascend Mount

Etna, that he had stayed some days at the *Hôtel des Étrangers,* in Nicata, and had then vanished.

The circular notes were endorsed by Mr. Smith, and had it not been that a notice regarding them was sent to all the correspondents of the London and Westminster Bank, their payment would not have been the subject of question. However, Carlo Nerone was interrogated as to how they came into his possession, and his answers were noted. An application was made to the police, who returned the answer that Carlo was quite innocent of Mr. Smith's death. His own statement was that Mr. Sutton Smith said he wished to make a journey through a part of Sicily where there were no banks, and asked him to cash ten of these notes, which he did. On the face of it, the story was credible, as there is nothing uncommon in an hotel-keeper giving change for circular notes.

It is quite true that the deceased Mr. Smith did ask Carlo Nerone to change these notes ; it must be added that he did so chiefly because Carlo offered him a far higher rate of

exchange than any banker would have done. Like many travellers abroad, Mr. Smith succumbed to the temptation of getting a higher rate, and he asked for more money than he really required. Both men and women who travel make it a business to get their notes or coin exchanged to the best advantage, and think that they have shown great cleverness when they can boast of obtaining a few more pence or shillings on exchanging a given amount than their friends or acquaintances. Carlo knew this, and his custom was to tell visitors that he would give them five per cent. more for their English or American money than any banker. By accepting such an offer Mr. Smith lost his life.

After Mr. Smith had endorsed the notes, Carlo said that he had not enough gold at hand, but that he would get it in an hour's time. He suggested that, if Mr. Smith wished to occupy his time in the interval, there was a curious natural phenomenon not far behind the hotel, which he could visit, and that he would send a guide to show him the way. He said also that as Mr. Smith

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had a mind to ascend Mount Etna and to do so alone, it might be well if he learned the best starting-point, which he would do by proceeding to the place indicated. Mr. Smith went. After traversing the upper part of the valley behind the hotel, Mr. Smith and the guide, who was the brigand Pietro, reached a part where there were many irregular blocks of lava and a quantity of stunted shrubs through which narrow paths had been cut. The best of the paths ran straight in front. Pietro turned aside, saying, 'Follow the path before you, and I shall meet you farther on.'

Mr. Smith knew enough Italian to understand what he said. He walked quickly forward. Suddenly his foot slipped at the top of a steep slope which he had not perceived; he tried to stop himself, but the impetus was too great, as he half fell, half rolled, down the slope till he disappeared in a wide crevice from which smoke issued. This was one of those openings on the lower slope of Etna which are doubly dangerous. The mephitic vapours from them suffocate the incautious

person who approaches too closely. No one who has fallen into such a crevice has issued from it alive. Sometimes the remains of the person who has fallen in may be observed from an elevated point near the crevice; but, after the lapse of a few days, the whole mass disappears. Mr. Smith was never seen again. Pietro returned to say that he had disappeared. Carlo retained the circular notes and the gold, which he would have handed to Mr. Smith had he come back. He went to Nicolosi and gave notice to the police that an Englishman named J. Sutton Smith, who had started from his hotel to ascend Mount Etna, had not since been heard of. The police registered the fact, and, when an investigation was ordered, they intimated that, as Carlo had given them notice of what had happened, he could not have had any hand in it. Carlo felt that he had done everything decently and in order, and he was satisfied with himself. Moreover, he was proud of having converted the crevice on the mountain-side to so useful a purpose. The place was known in the neighbourhood as the *Inferno*.

The repeated disappearance of persons who had stayed in the *Hôtel des Étrangers* at Nicata began to excite comment, and Carlo felt that he must be specially circumspect. Rumours were current that the ascent of the mountain was to be forbidden to all those who were unaccompanied by guides provided with a license. This was regarded by Carlo as an unfair interference with private industry and enterprise. He never liked the police, and now he was more than ever anxious to be let alone by them. Still, he thought it right to be prepared for emergencies. He was quite ready to leave Nicata if he had sufficient money wherewith to begin business afresh. He had gathered from his reading, and from conversing with strangers, that a banker was a person who could make a large fortune out of a small capital. By a banker he meant what is known as one in France, Germany, and Italy—that is, a man who is half speculator and half stock-broker, and not a man who is a banker in the English and American sense. He resolved, indeed, to give up his present occupation, if only for a

time, so as to lull suspicion, whenever he had found some rich traveller from whom money could be extracted on a large scale.

Carlo had become the father of a lusty boy, and the fresh responsibility rendered him the more desirous of gaining money. He was disappointed to learn that his brother, Eduardo, would not join him, and that he had elected to remain in London. He had found an English girl who was ready to become his wife, and he purposed founding an Italian restaurant. But, though Eduardo would not leave London, he was ready to help his elder brother with information which might interest and be of use to him. Eduardo read in the papers that Mr. Argoll and his chief clerk were on the point of going to Sicily. The papers which specially occupy themselves with the private affairs of conspicuous persons added the reasons for Mr. Argoll's journey. These facts were communicated to Carlo, who prepared to give Mr. Argoll a warm welcome in the event of his visiting Nicata.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. ARGOLL ABROAD.

'Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder a part of experience.'—BACON.

SO few Englishmen in good circumstances have not visited the Continent, before they are middle-aged, that it is difficult to realize what Mr. Argoll's feelings were, when going thither for the first time, after having long passed his fortieth year. To him an expedition to discover the North Pole would not have appeared more difficult or noteworthy. He had often looked upon the sea, and he had been upon it for a short space, with the result of feeling very ill and very frightened. He had heard much

about the misery experienced by those who, being bad sailors, crossed the Channel in stormy weather, and he grew so nervous as heartily to regret his imprudence in planning the trip, when the day fixed for his departure arrived.

Having a strong faith in the efficacy of medicine to cure or prevent maladies, Mr. Argoll bought several specifics against sea-sickness, and he began to use them before driving to the railway-station, where he was to enter the train for Dover. He had thought of nearly every thing when making preparations for his journey, except one, which never occurred to his mind till he had to take tickets to Paris for himself and Mr. Byker at Victoria Station. Mr. Argoll reached the station before Mr. Byker, and he went at once to the office, and asked for two tickets for Paris.

'First or second?' was the clerk's inquiry. Mr. Argoll said 'First,' got the tickets, and then he asked himself whether his chief clerk and himself were to travel and live together on a footing of equality.

The pair were on intimate, but not familiar terms. Mr. Argoll had no business secrets from his clerk, simply because he could not keep them to himself, and was obliged to open his mind to him. Being of a reticent temperament, Mr. Argoll was disposed to keep his own affairs locked in his bosom; yet, finding this impossible, and being compelled to make a confidant of Mr. Byker, he had the satisfaction of feeling that his confidence had not been misplaced, or the trust abused. Indeed, he accustomed himself to regard his chief clerk as a second self. Nevertheless, a second self is sometimes superfluous, and may be highly inconvenient. It is quite as bad as a second conscience, one conscience being generally more than enough to occasion anxiety and remorse.

Men meet daily in the City under the same roof, and when they leave their office they are as much strangers to each other's ways and doings as if they had never met, or heard the sound of each other's names. Two partners may work together during half a century, and never see each other out of their

place of business. This may be attributable, in part, to the one living in the southern, and the other in the western suburb of London; yet even if they live in the same or the next street, they may still remain utter strangers to each other out of business hours. It is often as well that their intimacy should cease when their office-door is closed behind them. Should they keep it up afterwards, they might find reason to regret doing so. Two partners may agree to differ, and by a rare chance they may remain bosom friends; but the wives of two partners are almost certain to quarrel, and, even in the improbable event of their wives remaining good friends, their children, if they have any, will undoubtedly be at daggers drawn. Jealousy and uncharitableness may be called the note of personal intercourse between City folks.

Two partners in business recognise that they are on an equal footing socially, even should the one be much richer than the other. But the relation between the partner in a firm and one of the clerks, is as different from that between the partners themselves as that be-

tween the commissioned and the non-commissioned officers in a regiment. There is a recognition of inequality on either side. They never expect to meet as members of the same club, or to dine at each other's table; and should a partner, by way of exception, invite one of his clerks to dine at his house, no clerk ever dreams of returning the invitation.

This condition of things is not peculiar to a country in which the social inequality of all men is the rule; for the clerk in a business house in the Republic of France, the Swiss Confederation, and the Republic of the United States of America, stands in the same relation to his employer that such a man does in the Monarchical City of London. Perhaps, if Mr. Argoll had given the matter a thought when arranging to start for Sicily, he might have arranged that Mr. Byker and he should not travel together; and he could have averted any difficulty by sending him on before, or making him follow by a subsequent train.

Mr. Byker was rather late at the railway-station, owing to the reluctance of his old

mother to part with him. She cried bitterly, and there is something very pathetic and painful in the sorrow of a feeble woman of seventy. Her son was too much affected himself to be able to console her. He knew not what to say. Again and again he was on the point of announcing that he would not leave her, even if he had to sacrifice his situation as a penalty for staying behind ; but his early training, and his strong sentiment of duty, proved superior to his filial affection. His whole nature revolted at the thought of allowing Mr. Argoll to travel alone, after promising to keep him company. Besides, he was unable to imagine how his master could dispense with his counsel. He sincerely believed that Mr. Argoll would be utterly helpless without him.

In addition to being an excellent and trustworthy clerk, Mr. Byker had an opinion of his own value and importance which, perhaps, was slightly exaggerated. He admitted his employer's abilities, and he did not begrudge him his fortune ; but he was firmly convinced that his own services had chiefly contributed

to render the firm of Argoll and Solar rich and famous. That no delicate piece of business could be properly or successfully conducted without him, was a fact which he did not consider open to doubt. He was not given to boasting. Indeed, no one had ever heard him ascribe praise to himself, even when the entire credit of a brilliant transaction was clearly his due. He constantly spoke of 'our house,' or 'our firm;' but he never even implied that he was other than a subordinate in the house or the firm. Yet, like many other men, his inmost thoughts did not find an echo in words, or, rather, his feeling of self-sufficiency was too profound and pervading to permit of being voiced forth.

Though it was a great wrench to leave his mother, he strongly felt that he had no option. His heart-strings were wrung, yet he remained master of his feelings. In addition to the conviction that Mr. Argoll would be helpless without him, he entertained a wish to make the journey. His short trip to the Continent had sharpened his appetite for travel. He had not much imagination, but

he had a longing to behold with his own eyes the places about which he had heard so much in the way of business, and to visit some of the firms on the Continent with which he had corresponded. He had heard that Mr. Argoll purposed stopping in Paris in order to have an interview with Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, the members of a great financial house there, with which the firm of Argoll and Solar had transacted business on a large scale for many years. Mr. Byker felt very curious to see them and their office.

Mr. Byker had made an arrangement for a friend of his mother, who lived in the north of England and who was always glad to stay in London for a few weeks, visiting and remaining with her during his absence. At any other time this would have pleased his mother greatly, but now she seemed solely concerned about the circumstance that her son was going away, and, as she repeatedly said, was going to 'the Indies,' or some place quite as outlandish and remote. She refused to be comforted. He waited by her side, speaking words of love and comfort, till he feared that he would

be too late for the train. At last he had to kiss her with fervour and affection, and tear himself away.

The train was on the point of starting as Mr. Byker entered the station, where he found Mr. Argoll fuming and fretting.

'Come along, Byker,' he said. 'I thought something had happened to you. Here's your ticket.'

Mr. Byker had so little luggage that he could place what he had in the compartment of the carriage. He was surprised when, on looking at his ticket, he found it to be a first-class one, and he was still more surprised when Mr. Argoll beckoned him to take a vacant seat beside him. Mr. Argoll seemed ill at ease. Mr. Byker felt entirely out of his element. Both would have been more comfortable and contented apart.

Nothing happened during the trip to Dover and during the passage across the Channel which deserves special mention. Mr. Argoll had taken no less than three specifics against sea-sickness; one before entering the railway-carriage, one during the

run to Dover, and one on embarking. The natural result followed. Before he had been ten minutes on board the steamer he was helplessly sick, the infallible preventives appearing to hasten and increase his suffering. Mr. Byker remained perfectly well, and tried to console his master, who, in the bitterness of his heart, recklessly exclaimed that he would give fifty thousand pounds to be put on shore that moment. When the steamer reached Calais harbour and Mr. Argoll felt better, he made a rash vow and said:

'Catch me ever crossing the Channel again! I've had enough of it.'

Mr. Argoll continued depressed and ill during the journey from Calais to Paris. Perhaps if he had not poisoned himself with so many specifics against sea-sickness, he might never have suffered at all, or he might have entirely recovered on leaving the steamer. He heartily wished himself back in London, and, if he could have got there without re-crossing the Channel, he would have returned immediately.

He was soon rendered more uncomfortable

and unhappy in another way. Two of his fellow-travellers in the compartment were Englishmen who occupied themselves for a time in reading the French papers which they had bought. One said to the other in a loud tone, and with entire indifference as to whether any person in the compartment overheard him or understood what he said :

'I say, Charlie, here's a paragraph in the *Canard* about *The Riviera Sanitation Company;* it seems there's going to be an inquiry. I always thought it a fishy affair.'

The other replied :

'I'm glad, Dick, I've nothing in it; I warned my clients not to touch it with a pair of tongs.'

The two men were youthful and ill-mannered stockbrokers out for a holiday. They went on to speak in uncomplimentary terms of the firm of Argoll and Solar, and they said many things which made Mr. Argoll wince.

This was not the first time Mr. Argoll had learned that there was discontent amongst the shareholders in *The Riviera Sanitation Company*, and it was his intention to confer

on the subject with Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, in concert with whom his firm had founded the company. As was stated in the first chapter, the large sum which Mr. Argoll derived from establishing that company had rendered him more than a millionaire. Both he and Mr. Byker knew only too well that the shareholders had good grounds for being intensely dissatisfied.

Mr. Argoll's next excitement occurred at the railway-station in Paris, when his luggage was examined. He had never seen the process before, and he did not approve of his portmanteau and bags being opened and searched. The Custom-House officers were very strict with him. One of the first things upon which they placed their hands was his medicine-chest, and this they regarded with suspicion ; the large bottle of opodeldoc next excited their curiosity.

'Tell them,' he said to Mr. Byker, 'that it's my medicine-chest, and that I'm an invalid.'

Mr. Byker did his best to communicate these interesting facts, with the result of

puzzling the Custom-House officers and surprising Mr. Argoll. The officer insisted upon opening the bottle; he tasted the contents, and made a very wry face. After having satisfied himself that the bottle did not contain a pleasant liquor, he suffered the medicine-chest, containing the bottle of opodeldoc, to pass. He was confirmed in his opinion that the English who carried such things with them were eccentric to the verge of lunacy.

What surprised Mr. Argoll was that Mr. Byker did not appear to understand the officer's French, and that the officer was clearly unable to understand his. Till then, he had regarded Mr. Byker as an accomplished linguist.

'What's the matter, Byker?' he said. 'I thought you knew French as well as English.'

'Well, sir,' was the reply, 'I am rather out of practice, and could not get the officers to understand why anyone should carry so much medicine about with him.'

'I hope you'll get on better another time.

I look to you to act as interpreter, you know.'

Mr. Byker did not know anything of the kind: he had never dreamed that this was one of the reasons why Mr. Argoll desired his company, and he had not the courage to explain that his knowledge of colloquial French was very scanty. He could speak a few phrases with a perfect British accent, but he could scarcely make out a word of what was said to him. He felt intensely relieved when, on reaching the *Grand Hôtel*, he found he could get on when he spoke English. Yet he dreaded lest at any moment he might be compelled to expose his ignorance before Mr. Argoll.

Mr. Argoll had no desire to see the sights of Paris. He wished to have an interview with Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, and then to continue his journey. The time being early in August, most of the people who could leave Paris for some watering-place had done so. Indeed, M. Blumenheim and M. Caradoc had returned from the sea-side in order to meet Mr. Argoll. Their wives did not regret their departure, as they were con-

fident of amusing themselves during their husbands' absence.

On the morning after arriving at the Grand Hôtel, Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker started for the office of Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, in the *Rue Vivienne*. They had studied the map before leaving the hotel, and they were glad to see that they would not have far to walk, that the road seemed almost straight, and that it was scarcely possible for them to lose their way. After crossing the street at the corner of the *Place de l'Opéra*, they could not fail to reach the *Rue Vivienne* if they only went along one of the streets in front of them. Instead of proceeding in the direct course they turned into a side-street which seemed a near cut. After walking round and round for a time and getting no closer to their destination they were puzzled.

'Surely,' said Mr. Argoll, 'we ought to be there by this time!'

'Yes, sir,' replied Mr. Byker, 'we should have been if the routes on the map had been correct; but the routes on a map do not make allowance for crossings and turnings.'

This seemed a reasonable explanation. However, after walking along for some minutes longer and appearing to return to the place from which they started, or some place very like it, they hailed a passing cab, and Mr. Byker gave the driver instructions where to go. Either the driver was stupid or else Mr. Byker's French was unintelligible; in any case the driver did not seem disposed to start. Annoyed at his hesitation, Mr. Byker said sharply, '*Allez*——,' and after a short pause to collect his thoughts or recall the words he wished to use, he added, '*au Diable.*'

'*C'est le bon Diable vous voudrez dire, bourgeois?*'

Mr. Byker rashly said '*Oui;*' the driver replied '*Bon,*' turned on his seat, whipped his horse, and off they went.

About a quarter of an hour elapsed, and the *Rue Vivienne* was not reached.

'What can be the matter, Byker?' exclaimed Mr. Argoll; 'we surely ought to be there by this time. No map can have omitted all these turnings, and we seem to be on the

opposite side of the river now. When I looked at the map, the *Rue Vivienne* was on the same side of the river as the *Grand Hôtel.*'

Mr. Byker was both puzzled and out of temper; he charitably concluded that the driver was drunk. Putting his head out of the window he asked:

'*Ou sommes nous, cocher?*'

The driver pointed with his whip and replied:

'*Nous y sommes, c'est tout près, bourgeois; la boutique est au coin de cette rue en face.*'

Mr. Byker imperfectly translated this reassuring phrase to Mr. Argoll. In a few minutes' time the cab stopped in front of a large ready-made clothing warehouse, where there was a sign of a large black Devil, with horns and hoofs, and on which there figured in enormous letters the words '*Au bon Diable.*' Both got out; neither knew exactly what to do. Mr. Argoll said there must be some mistake. Mr. Byker could only reply:

'I'm sure I can't understand it.'

'Neither can I,' remarked Mr. Argoll.

Then he took a card out of his pocket and wrote the name and address of Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc in large letters, and motioned to the driver that he wished to go there. The driver motioned in turn for them to re-enter the cab, muttering, '*Mon Dieu, comme les Anglais sont bêtes!*' and drove straight to the desired number in the *Rue Vivienne.*

It was half-past eleven o'clock in the morning when they reached it. Two clerks were in the office, one of whom could understand English and speak it so as to make himself intelligible. When asked whether either partner was in, he replied that both had gone to breakfast. When asked whether the chief clerk was in, he replied that he had gone to breakfast also.

'When will any of them return?' asked Mr. Argoll.

'Near to two o'clock, sir,' was the reply. He left his card, with a message that he would return at two.

He was so astonished that he forgot the misadventure with the cab.

'This would not do at Athelstane House, Byker?'

'No, sir; we keep better hours there. But then Paris is a city of pleasure.'

'It looks like it, Byker. How busy men like Blumenheim and Caradoc can keep things going and be away for hours and let their principal clerk go too, is more than I can understand!'

Mr. Byker agreed with his master; he was not sorry that his master's thoughts were diverted from his own mistakes.

Neither knew that each partner had been in the office at nine o'clock, and had done between nine and eleven as much business as Messrs. Argoll and Solar would do between eleven and one, when they, too, would have thought about going to luncheon. The only real difference is that the time occupied by Frenchmen at their breakfast is rather longer than that which English City men allow for their luncheon; on the other hand, as the Frenchmen stay at their offices to a later hour, the actual time during which business is transacted is nearly the same on both sides of the

Channel. This information was gained later by Mr. Argoll; at the moment, however, he was pleased to pride himself upon being the harder worker.

Mr. Argoll saw the partners at two o'clock; the senior one had visited him in London; the junior he had not met before. The senior partner spoke English well, and the other could make himself understood in it. The chief piece of news they had to give related to *The Riviera Sanitation Company.*

'This is a very unpleasant business,' they said to him. 'We did not think matters were nearly so bad as they seem to be.'

Now, Mr. Argoll's rule was never to retain any interest as a shareholder in a company which he had established. If he received cash for promoting it, he put it into his pocket; if he received shares, he sold them at once, and then he had no further concern in the future of the company. His mind was kept easy, as he said; the company's failure or success neither depressed nor excited him. Some people reproached him with this in-

difference to his financial offspring. He bore their censure with a light heart.

Mr. Argoll had made the calculation that three out of every five of the companies to which he had acted as sponsor, or of which he was the father, had proved disastrous failures, and he argued that, if he retained an interest in them all, he might lose in the three far more than he could gain in the two ; whereas, if he contented himself with taking what he could get out of each at the outset, he would always be the gainer. It was not, then, a matter of personal concern to learn that *The Riviera Sanitation Company* was in financial straits ; he constantly heard of companies being wound up, and this was one reason why he preferred floating foreign loans to promoting joint-stock companies. But what made him uneasy was to hear that there was a likelihood of an investigation into the way in which *The Riviera Sanitation Company* had been placed before the British public.

Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc had tried, without success, to get French investors to put their money into this venture.

They spent much money in getting it puffed in the French papers, but investors held aloof. Then they introduced it to the British public, in conjunction with Messrs. Argoll and Solar, and the British public, acting with its wonted folly in money matters, had readily subscribed the required capital.

Unlike Messrs. Argoll and Solar, the firm of Blumenheim and Caradoc had retained many shares in this company, and, as there was a liability on these shares, the firm would have to pay a large sum in the event of the company going into liquidation with debts which could not be met with the assets in hand.

'Surely,' said Mr. Argoll, 'the capital cannot all have been spent yet?'

'No; we believe there are still a few thousand pounds left, and that the amount in hand would meet nearly all the liabilities. But some shareholders seem to have found out that no expenditure could ever make the concern pay, and they appear to have either seen or heard of a letter which it

is alleged was penned to that effect before the company was advertised.'

'I hope none of them have seen such a letter,' exclaimed Mr. Argoll; but, recollecting himself, he hastened to add: 'I mean I hope things are not so bad as all that. I suppose, however, as this is holiday-time, nothing will be done for some months.'

The senior partner, who wished to have a private talk with Mr. Argoll, invited him to dinner that evening, and then they discussed together what to do in the event of the company's affairs taking a troublesome turn. There is generally more than one grizzly skeleton in the cupboard of a successful financier.

Whilst M. Blumenheim and Mr. Argoll conversed together, M. Caradoc talked with Mr. Byker. The latter asked to be shown over the office, and the contrast between the light and airy, the well-furnished, and artistically decorated rooms in this office, and those in Athelstane House, produced a great impression upon him. He thought that if he had one of these rooms to sit in he would

find his work far easier. But, if he could have made an exchange of offices, he would still have remarked a difference between them, unless he could also have taken the clear atmosphere of the *Rue Vivienne* to brighten the narrow lane in which stood Athelstane House.

Before Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker left this office, the whole party engaged in general conversation.

'When do you return home, Mr. Argoll?' was the question which M. Caradoc put, more for the sake of saying something than because he cared when he went.

Mr. Argoll replied:

'I am only at the beginning of my travels; I mean to visit Sicily before my return.'

The two partners exchanged glances, which signified, 'What can he be up to?'

They knew that Mr. Argoll had never left London before, and M. Blumenheim used to say every time he saw him there:

'Now, Mr. Argoll, when will you visit us in Paris?'

To which the reply invariably was:

'I promise to pay you a long visit there whenever I am able to get away from business for a few days.'

M. Blumenheim thought that Mr. Argoll's present visit was in fulfilment of that promise; but when he learned that Mr. Argoll was going as far as Sicily, and was taking his chief clerk with him, he was filled with wonder and curiosity. He was too well bred to put a direct question then, yet he hoped to elicit more information after dinner in the evening.

'You are not afraid of brigands, are you?' was the question which M. Blumenheim not unnaturally put, the belief being common in Paris that brigands abound in Greece and Italy.

'Not in the slightest. The Duke—I mean I was told by a friend that none have been seen in Sicily for ten years. Nerone, the last and worst of them, died in prison at Naples, and no one has taken his place.'

M. Blumenheim noted the slip of the tongue, and he felt the more curious about Mr. Argoll's mission and as to who the

Duke was of whom he spoke as a friend. To keep the conversation in the same groove, M. Caradoc interposed with the remark:

'I should think, my dear sir, that the Italian brigands cannot be half so bad as the police in Servia. Have you seen the account in this morning's paper?'

Neither Mr. Argoll nor Mr. Byker had done so; M. Caradoc handed the paper to the latter, saying, as he did so:

'The story is worth reading, and if you care to take the paper you may.'

Mr. Byker took it and thanked him. When they returned to the hotel he read the story, and told Mr. Argoll the substance of it. As has been said already, Mr. Byker could read French, though his power of speaking it was far less than he supposed, and did not give him any appreciable advantage over those who acknowledged their inability to do so.

The story was to the effect that at Pirot, in Servia, many persons were never seen again after being taken into custody by the police.

All these persons were understood to have money in their possession. Suspicions were excited, and there was an outcry for an investigation. At last the police were arrested, and their office was carefully searched, with the result of seventeen skeletons being found buried in different parts of the yard behind it. Large quantities of clothing were also found in the rooms occupied by the police, and the clothes were identified as having belonged to merchants who had left their homes with considerable sums in their pockets, and of whom nothing had since been heard. Mr. Argoll's remark, after hearing the story, was:

'Well, Byker, it is fortunate that we are not going through Servia, though, if we were, I should not tempt anyone by carrying gold with me. I hope the Italian police are better than the Servian, and I shall not trouble them any more than I can help.'

'I hope, sir, we shall not be troubled by brigands or police; but don't you think it would be safer to make inquiries before we go farther?'

'Nonsense, Byker! I am certain the Duke would not have said that there were no brigands left in Sicily unless he were quite sure of it. He often goes there himself, so he ought to know. Besides, it would not suit his book to let me proceed there on a fool's errand.'

Mr. Byker was silenced, but not satisfied.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARIS TO NICATA.

'I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.'

TENNYSON.

MR. ARGOLL did not intend spending more than one day in Paris. His purpose in remaining there at all was business, and not sight-seeing; besides, he took no pleasure in churches and picture-galleries, in monuments, or museums. He accounted time passed in sight-seeing as time wasted. Besides, he cared for none of these things. His mind had got into and moved in a groove. Dr. Johnson said of

the mediocre poet and estimable physician, Sir Richard Blackmore, that 'he had lived in the City till he had learned its note,' and he said this after quoting some sentences which the poet had couched 'in language such as Cheapside easily furnished.' Though Mr. Argoll did not live in the City, he was far more of a City man than Sir Richard Blackmore, who did. Indeed, he had grown into a kind of City automaton, which responded to the fluctuations of the Money Market.

Yet, though caring little for Paris, he prolonged his stay there far beyond the brief space he had determined upon. Having accepted an invitation to dine with M. Blumenheim, he could not well refuse one from his partner; and then the partners proposed that he should spend another night in their company at Bignon's Restaurant, in order that they might let him understand how strangers are entertained in Paris. If they had shown him the bill which they had to pay for the dinner, he would have opened his eyes, and learned that the strangers must

have very long and full purses who enjoy themselves in fashionable Parisian restaurants. Neither M. Blumenheim nor his partner was in the habit of frequenting restaurants, and both considered the charges excessive; but they consoled themselves with thinking that they had made an impression upon Mr. Argoll. What was still better, they had entered into a bargain with him which they hoped would repay them many times over.

The fine house in Palace Gardens, which Mr. Argoll occupied, never seemed so fine to him as after his visit to that of M. Blumenheim in the *Boulevard Haussmann.* The latter had only a single flat in the large and lofty mansion which looked so commanding from the street, and yet he paid as much rent as he would have done for a whole house in a fashionable London square. When he contrasted M. Blumenheim's rooms with his own, Mr. Argoll felt that he was the more fortunate of the two. The French banker or merchant could not exist in the gloomy and stuffy office in a narrow street where

the English banker or merchant spends the greater part of each day; on the other hand, the Englishman could not sleep in the small bedroom which the Frenchman occupies during the night. When M. Blumenheim showed Mr. Argoll his bedroom, the latter made a mental note to the effect that his own dressing-room was much more spacious, and he felt surprised that anyone should inhabit such a room and live.

But, whilst he did not envy M. Blumenheim's home-comforts, he felt differently when he visited his partner, M. Caradoc, at Saint Denis. It is true the house itself was on a smaller scale than that in Palace Gardens; still it was not less comfortable. Mr. Argoll was greatly impressed with the garden. He had no knowledge of gardening, or any taste for it; but he much preferred the fruit and vegetables which had been grown under his own eye. Amongst the many quack systems which he had tried, that of living upon fruit and vegetables had attracted him for a time; and, whilst he was full of faith in its virtues, and before he suffered in health, his hobby was

to grow the fruit and vegetables upon which he barely existed. Though now eating meat again, and feeling the better for it, he still retained a fondness for fresh vegetables and fruit; and he spent much money in growing both at Palace Gardens, the fruit being grown in a hot-house, the vegetables in the open air. This was a hobby which caused frequent collisions between him and his wife. Mrs. Argoll greatly preferred the products of Covent Garden market. She was less ignorant, perhaps, than one of Mrs. Gore's heroines, who fancied that cucumbers grew in slices; yet she knew nothing about the cultivation of vegetables and fruit, and her conception of a garden was a place set apart for the growth of flowers.

In M. Caradoc's garden at St. Denis, Mr. Argoll saw fruit as well as vegetables flourishing in the open air, and he looked with envy upon the clusters of fine grapes hanging from vines trained against the wall, and the ripe plums and peaches upon the trees. That so attractive a display of fruit was possible so near Paris gave him a better

and more favourable notion of the climate than any number of statistics.

The purpose of Mr. Argoll's journey was made known to his first entertainer after a copious dinner. He did not mean to tell either partner anything about his plans; but the best resolutions sometimes fade away at a dining-table. Almost before he knew what he said, he had explained to M. Blumenheim why he had resolved to visit Sicily. As Mr. Argoll's purchase of an estate from the Duke of Fontainebleau would not interfere with any of M. Blumenheim's schemes, he perfectly approved of what Mr. Argoll meant to do. He told his partner about it, and they both agreed to show further attention to Mr. Argoll, with a view of getting a service in return.

Both the partners occupied a place in the Parisian world of finance corresponding to that occupied in London by Mr. Argoll. Neither firm was in the highest circle of financial sanctity, and each was ready to enter into business which the best houses would hardly condescend to

entertain. M. Blumenheim was supposed to be of German or Austrian origin and parentage; but no two persons were agreed as to the place of his birth. He was also supposed to be one of the unappreciated but lucky children of Israel, who have obtained almost supreme control over the Press and the money markets of the Continent, and who are making their influence felt in England and America; but, then, he ostentatiously professed himself an ardent member of the Church of Rome and an ultra-patriotic Frenchman. It is possible that he had been baptized and naturalized, and that his religious zeal and patriotic fervour were the consequences of a change in his creed and nationality. He had the great advantage of knowing how to ingratiate himself alike with Jews and Gentiles, and this faculty he may have owed to his early training and his conversion.

His partner, M. Caradoc, was a Breton, who had all the astuteness of the Hebrew and the suavity of the Frenchman, and who never forgot to be sympathetic and polite

when driving a hard bargain, or when taking undue advantage of his neighbours. In all their dealings with Mr. Argoll the partners had found him more than a match for them, and they admired him accordingly. He was as little encumbered with inconvenient scruples as either of them. The two firms knew and respected each other's strong points. Both M. Blumenheim and M. Caradoc liked Mr. Argoll as an ally, and they would have feared him as an adversary or a rival.

When they entertained him at Bignon's Restaurant, their purpose was to make a proposal for his co-operation in a scheme which they had in prospect, and which had relation to Sicily. When dinner was over, and they were drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, the senior partner began :

'We should be glad, Mr. Argoll, if you would pay some attention to a little matter when you are in Sicily which interests us, and in which you might possibly like to take part. You know, I suppose, that there are not much more than five hundred miles of railway in Sicily, and that only the principal

coast towns are connected together by rail. Now some correspondents of ours have pointed out that there is a good opening for branch lines to develop the internal resources of the island, which are very great. If concessions for these lines could be obtained on favourable terms from the municipalities, we might do a good stroke of business.'

'I never thought of such a thing,' was Mr. Argoll's reply. He added, 'Indeed, I don't know much about Sicily; but, if I get this property, I should like to see plenty of railways made.'

'Well, then,' said M. Caradoc, 'perhaps you might make some inquiries on the spot. If money should be required to strike a bargain, we are ready to advance ten thousand pounds, and we can instruct Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani, our correspondents in Catania, to let you have that sum on application, provided you let it be reckoned to our joint account, and apportioned when these Egyptians are settled.'

'When I get there I shall see what can

be done ; if I remember rightly I shall have to visit Catania on my way to or from the property I mean to look at, and then I shall call upon your correspondents.'

'Before you leave Paris,' said M. Blumenheim, 'I can send you some memoranda on the subject. A part of the scheme is to make a railway up Mount Etna. Judging from the one up the Righi and Mount Vesuvius, such a line ought to pay. It would start from a place called Nicata, where you will find the *Hôtel des Étrangers*, which is often advertised in our papers.'

Mr. Argoll made a note of this in his pocket-book. He was not displeased at the likelihood of his trip to Sicily proving a remunerative one. Indeed, he fancied it not impossible that he might make more profit out of these concessions, if he obtained them, than he would have to pay the Duke of Fontainebleau for his property and the title of Count. The conversation took another turn which had less general interest, relating as it did to an Egyptian loan, which both firms had the chief share in placing before

the public. The English firm contented itself with pocketing a handsome commission ; the French one held thousands of the bonds, and that firm was now mortified to find that the payment of interest upon them had been suspended. Mr. Argoll readily consented to try and make some arrangement regarding these bonds, and he was offered liberal terms if he succeeded. So he promised to give careful attention to the matter on his return to London.

He was charmed with his visit to Paris. He believed that he saw his way to increasing his fortune, and this bright prospect put him in good humour. Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc were delighted to have interested him in their projects, as they knew by experience that few things which he seriously took in hand failed to yield a profit to the promoters and their friends.

Mr. Byker had not been invited to accompany his master to the dinner-parties given by Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, nor was he sorry. He would have felt out of place at the tables where he sat as a

guest; besides, he did not regret being free to enjoy himself in his own way. With a view to improving his French, he went nightly to the places where it was spoken and sung. Though most of the theatres were shut, the Eden Theatre was open, and there he found things and persons to interest and amuse him, whilst he had other opportunities for doing so at the *Café Chantants*, where passing strangers are always welcome. He regretted when, on the morning of the fourth day, Mr. Argoll told him to prepare for starting in the evening, and asked him to make inquiry as to the best route for reaching Messina. After a careful study of the map and the time-tables, Mr. Byker reported that there was a choice of routes to Naples, the one by way of Marseilles and the Riviera, the other by way of Turin, and Mr. Argoll selected the latter, as he was reluctant to go nearer the French Riviera than he could help. When told that the journey from Naples to Messina would have to be made by sea, and that the trip would occupy a night and part of a day, he inti-

mated that he would not go at all. His remembrance of the Channel passage was still vivid. Happily, Mr. Byker found that by taking the train to Reggio, the trip across the Straits of Messina would occupy less than an hour, and then Mr. Argoll resolved to continue his journey.

Before leaving Paris a thing happened to Mr. Argoll which he deemed very strange, but which, unfortunately, is becoming a matter of everyday occurrence. The waiter brought a card to his room, saying that the bearer desired to see him. On the card was printed 'J. Mendel.' Had Mr. Argoll been at Athelstane House no one would have been admitted to his presence till he had first made known the nature of his business; but Mr. Argoll's curiosity being aroused, and Mr. Byker being out of the way, he ordered the visitor to be shown in. Mr. Mendel bowed, and said that he was 'the representative' of *Le Jour*.

It is one of the peculiarities of some highly civilized people to have reverted in one particular to the condition of their

barbarous forefathers. Amongst savages there is neither secrecy nor privacy. At one time it was considered fitting for a civilized man to keep his private affairs to himself, and most unbecoming in him to parade them before the public, or to permit others to do so. In England it is still thought improper, if not highly impertinent, for a man who is a stranger to another, to take him to task and examine him as to his opinions and the events of his life. But a man calling himself 'the representative' of some newspaper arrogates the right to put any question he pleases to an utter stranger, and to communicate the answers to the readers of his paper. This personage calls himself, and is called, an interviewer.

In the United States of America, where interviewing is largely practised, it may be regarded as a survival of the times when swarthy savages were the lords of the soil, the white men who ousted them having perpetuated their inquisitiveness. The English people, as a body, have not yet ceased to draw a distinction between what

is purely personal and what is a public matter, though strenuous efforts are making to cause them to abandon their reserve and their liking for retirement. But, then, as is often said, the English people are not progressive, and they have a confirmed belief that each man should mind his own business. In France, where the practice of interviewing has lately been introduced, the claim of 'the representative' of a newspaper to elicit information and publish it has been generally recognised. French people enjoy reading tittle-tattle. Anyone professing to have authority can have much of his own way amongst them. They enjoy being looked after, and 'the representative' of a newspaper is regarded by them as a journalistic policeman, and is treated with corresponding respect.

Mr. Argoll did not understand what business 'the representative' of *Le Jour* could have with him, unless it were to ask him to subscribe to it. He at once said to him:

'I really don't require your paper, as I can't read French.'

Mr. Mendel was a Franco-American journalist, being a French Canadian by birth and well versed in both French and English. He was surprised to hear Mr. Argoll's remark, and he hastened to say :

'I think, sir, there must be some mistake. I have come to see you as a journalist, feeling sure that our readers will be glad to learn your opinion on many points.'

Mr. Argoll was more puzzled than before ; he could not understand what consequence his opinions could be to the readers of *Le Jour*.

On seeing Mr. Mendel take out his notebook and make ready to write, it occurred to him that he was to be subjected to interviewing. He then said, after glancing at the card in his hand in order to learn 'the representative's' name :

'Mr. Mendel, you will excuse me if I object to talk farther with you. I wish you a very good-morning.'

Mr. Mendel had never before been treated so rudely. Though amazed at Mr. Argoll's audacity in treating a newspaper 'represen-

tative' in this summary fashion, he had the good sense not to expostulate, as he perceived that Mr. Argoll was in earnest; so, putting his note-book in his pocket, he rose, said 'Good-morning, sir,' and left the room.

The matter ended there, so far as Mr. Argoll knew. He left Paris that night. A copy of *Le Jour* was sent to Athelstane House by some attentive friend, and there it was consigned to the waste-paper basket. Mr. Mendel had been rebuffed, but not checkmated. An interviewer's occupation would be gone if he ever admitted that he had failed. If he cannot extract facts from the person to whom he applies, he trusts that his imagination will supply them. Mr. Mendel filled a column with an account of his interview. The narrative was introduced by the following remarks by the editor:

'Having learned that Mr. Argoll, the eminent English financier, and senior partner in the well-known firm of Messrs. Argoll and Solar, was in Paris, we deputed one of our representatives to call upon him and gather the valuable information which we

have much pleasure in laying before our readers.'

The representative then went on to tell his story. As is the custom of his kind, he devoted many sentences to a useless description of the room in the *Grand Hôtel* which Mr. Argoll occupied, noting the colour of the wall-paper and of the carpet, the style of the furniture, the number of chairs and tables. He then depicted Mr. Argoll, noting with equal minuteness what clothes he wore, and what his features were like, giving a clear picture of his semi-bald head. Then he set forth, as a fresh piece of information, that Mr. Argoll was not a constant reader of French newspapers; and the account ended with the statement that Mr. Argoll expressed his admiration of the French newspaper press and of *Le Jour* in particular, and then courteously bade 'the representative' farewell. Such an account is one of the triumphs of modern journalism. Nothing more worthless could be found in the newspapers fifty years ago. What will they not contain fifty years hence!

If Mr. Argoll had stayed another day in Paris he would have been visited by 'the representatives' of several other newspapers. Some of them wrote nothing when they found that he had departed; others, of a more imaginative temperament, wrote accounts purporting to be interviews with him, and in which he was made to say many things which might never have entered his head, and which, if they had, would never have issued from his lips. A purely fictitious interview is always the most readable.

A paragraph in *The Daily Messenger*—an English paper published in Paris — was founded upon fact. The writer remembered what had appeared in a London journal relative to Mr. Argoll's intended journey, and he stated that the English financier was on his way to Catania in order to buy a property belonging to the Duke of Fontainebleau. This paragraph was translated, and appeared in some Neapolitan newspapers, from which it was copied into those of Sicily, and came before the eyes of Carlo Nerone.

Having no further business to transact in Paris, Mr. Argoll was impatient to depart, and having the prospect of turning his Sicilian trip to profitable account, he was most anxious to get there without delay. Besides, he had telegraphed for all his letters to be forwarded to the '*Poste Restante*' at Catania. Mr. Byker, on the other hand, would gladly have prolonged his stay, and, having a greater curiosity than his employer to see foreign parts, he hoped that they would break their journey at Turin, Genoa and Rome. But Mr. Argoll insisted upon proceeding at full speed to Naples, and Mr. Byker had to obey orders. After an exhausting journey, during which Mr. Argoll slept nearly the whole time, Naples was reached, and he declared his intention of resting there.

Though the Stock Exchange and the life which revolves round it had the chief interest for Mr. Argoll in any city, yet he was greatly struck with Naples, and, for the first time in his life, he gave up several hours to the toil of sight-seeing. He had read few

books since he was a boy. The daily and weekly papers, share lists and prospectuses of new companies had been his sole mental food for twenty years. If the reading public were composed of persons of his peculiar tastes, modern authors would have to seek admission into the workhouse, and Mr. Mudie would have to close his library.

Probably it was owing to having read so little since boyhood which was worth reading, that the contents of the few books which Mr. Argoll had perused were engraven on his mind. Amongst them was one by Bulwer Lytton; it was entitled *The Last Days of Pompeii.* Of all the writings of the late Lord Lytton none has a better chance of surviving than this. He was fortunate in his subject. It appeals to the readers of all ages and both sexes, being at once a pretty and a thrilling story. The final catastrophe is grander and more appalling than that which the imagination of any novelist has ever conceived. In his boyhood Mr. Argoll had an intense longing to see the actual locality which was the theatre

of the occurrences described in the romance. Now that he was in Naples, the old longing revived, and he determined to visit the ruins of Pompeii.

He desired Mr. Byker to make inquiries as to how best to get there. Mr. Byker had a very vague notion about Pompeii ; he knew the name, but that was all. The hotel porter advised him to engage a guide. This was not really necessary, yet it is the fixed belief of hotel porters, especially in Southern Italy, that no Englishman can find his way—perhaps it should be written, ought to find his way—anywhere without a guide. Certain it is that guides are nearly as plentiful and pertinacious as beggars, and it is not impossible that a good understanding prevails between guides and hotel porters.

The guide explained to Mr. Argoll that as it was best to start by an early train for Pompeii, he had better postpone his visit till the following morning ; and he added that the afternoon might be usefully employed in visiting the National Museum, where the articles found during the excavation at

Pompeii are collected and shown. The advice was sound, notwithstanding that it was dictated by a desire on the guide's part to be employed on two occasions instead of one. It is not necessary to dwell upon the visit to the National Museum ; suffice it to say that Mr. Argoll was greatly struck with what he saw, and was rendered still more eager to visit the ruins themselves. On Mr. Byker the effect was less marked ; he had no relish for antiquities, and he had not the memories of youthful dreams to impart interest to the remains of old Roman days.

When they went to Pompeii itself, Mr. Byker was the more impressed of the two, Mr. Argoll expecting to find a city more closely resembling that described, or rather reproduced, by the novelist. But when Mr. Byker saw the ruts in the stone pavement which had been worn by cart-wheels rolling over it two thousand years ago, he marvelled exceedingly, and admitted that the place was indeed a strange one. This impression, which was made after entering, grew stronger when he was shown the marks of the feet of

the Roman maidens who used to draw water at the well, the baker's shop in which charred loaves were found, and the paintings on the walls of private houses looking as fresh as if they had been finished yesterday, and being as brilliant in colour as any modern works of art.

Mr. Argoll's first disappointment passed off as he explored the ruins, and some of his boyish fancies became realities. For the moment, the crust of his City life fell off and his mind became freshened and receptive of new impressions. He returned to Naples without once speculating as to the possible price of Consols, or as to how he could add to his store of money. The beauty of the day had some share in diverting his thoughts and raising his spirits. He had never before seen the sun shine so brightly, or the sky appear so blue, neither had he beheld a sea which was still bluer than the sky. If the new ideas which coursed through his brain that night could have been contrasted with those which ordinarily did so, he would have appeared a new man. The spirit of

the place had entered into and illumined his soul. He had even forgotten that he ought to feel ill and have an excuse for taking medicine. Indeed, he had not taken a single dose since he vainly had recourse to drugs to ward off sea-sickness. The change of air and scene had transformed him. He read in a guide-book the phrase, 'See Naples, and die.'

'What stuff!' was his ejaculation. 'If the fellows who write guide-books were here to-night, they would say, "See Naples, and live."'

He rose the following morning in a more sedate and commonplace frame of mind. The responsibility of possessing a million sterling oppressed him. The passion for adding to it resumed its sway. He desired Mr. Byker to see when the first train started for Reggio, and to make arrangements for going by it. Again Mr. Byker was disappointed. He was quite as loath to quit Naples as he had been to quit Paris.

Mr. Byker learned from the hotel-porter that the express started at 2.5 in the after-

noon, and arrived at Reggio the following morning at 10.30. He learned also from the hotel porter that there were many brigands in Sicily, and that sensible persons remained in hotels at Naples instead of going there. Both Neapolitan hotel porters and hotel proprietors are given to advise visitors to prolong their stay, and they are apt to use the bugbear of brigands to hinder visitors from leaving their hotels. Mr. Argoll had been warned of this by his friends, and when Mr. Byker reported what he had been told, he said :

'Don't be alarmed, Byker. If there are brigands in Sicily we should have heard of them from the Duke.'

Mr. Byker recollected reading about the capture of Mr. Moens in Southern Italy, and that Sicily was a far more dangerous place, and he was very reluctant to run any risk. After thinking for a few moments Mr. Argoll said :

'Well, Byker, if you are afraid of falling into the hands of brigands, and being killed because you have no money, I'll tell you

what I shall do. Let's change names whilst we are in Sicily. If we should be captured, they will take care of you as being the rich man ; and if they let me go, I can make arrangements for your ransom. You couldn't do so for me if they thought me a prize.'

'You are very good, sir,' was Mr. Byker's reply. He felt sure his employer would pay a ransom for him, and he thought if he were supposed to be a rich man his life would be in no danger. He was really pleased, then, that Mr. Argoll should have made the offer, whilst Mr. Argoll much preferred the prospect of his clerk remaining in the brigands' clutches to being there himself. They agreed to pass under each other's names after reaching Messina.

The journey to Messina was less arduous than they had expected. Somewhat to his own surprise Mr. Argoll did not suffer from sickness during the trip across the Straits. It so happened that the sea between Reggio and Messina was exceptionally smooth. If the wind had not been quite still he would have been tossed about in a way to make

him think the English Channel a mill-pond by comparison.

They took the train from Messina to Catania, and put up at the Albergo Orientale. Not long after arriving, a Sicilian, who spoke very fluent English, entered into conversation with them. As he appeared to be well informed and to know the country, Mr. Argoll conversed with and questioned him. He was rather taken aback to find himself addressed by the stranger as Mr. Byker. The truth is, the stranger had been present and had watched them as they entered their names in the hotel register. When Mr. Argoll asked how he knew his name, he replied:

'I saw you write it a few minutes ago;' he added: 'You need not be surprised, gentlemen, at my speaking your language; I have lived in England, and I like your country and people very much. Englishmen are all rich and generous.'

It is always pleasant for Englishmen abroad to meet with foreigners who speak their tongue, and who make appreciative

remarks about them and their country. The result in the present case was to make Mr. Argoll more communicative than he would otherwise have been; he told the stranger whither he meant to go, and asked for his advice.

'Curiously enough,' was the reply, 'I purpose going to the same place to-morrow morning; if you do not object, we can go together. I can arrange for a conveyance which will take us all.'

The proposition was accepted with hearty thanks.

'How fortunate!' said Mr. Argoll to Mr. Byker. 'We may save money by this, as we shall not require a guide. I like the man's looks. He seems most intelligent, and he is extremely polite.'

Mr. Byker was of the same opinion.

The party set off early the next day, and after a drive of several hours their destination was reached. The carriage stopped at the door of a small house with the sign in front of *Hôtel des Étrangers.*

Mr. Argoll said :

'Is this the place? It seems very small.'

The stranger remarked:

'I hope to make you feel at home, gentlemen, and that you will find the hotel comfortable, though small.' Then, making a low bow, he added, 'I am entirely at your service. Perhaps, as you may not know my name, you will accept my card.'

He handed a card to Mr. Byker, who read on it:

'Carlo Nerone, proprietor, *Hôtel des Étrangers*, Nicata.'

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. ARGOLL AT WESTBOURNE.

'Of our amusements ask You ?—We amuse
Ourselves and friends with seaside walks and views,
Or take a morning ride, a novel, or the news:
Or seeking nothing, glide about the street,
And so engaged, with various parties meet;
Awhile we stop, discourse of wind and tide,
Bathing and books, the raffle and the ride:
Thus with the aid which shops and sailing give,
Life passes on; 'tis labour, but we live.'

CRABBE.

WESTBOURNE is a pleasant and much-frequented watering-place. It has grown rapidly and large without ceasing to be attractive. The modern builder, who is nearly as foul and terrible a fiend as any dragon of fable, had not been

permitted to work mischief at Westbourne. If he had been suffered to have his own way, every tree would have been cut down, and every green and open space there would have been covered with hideous bricks and mortar.

The Duke of Derbyshire, who was the owner of much land at Westbourne, had resolved that the new houses should not be eyesores to make the intelligent observer grieve that they had ever been erected. Westbourne was built after a plan, and the plan was both sensible and praiseworthy. The old trees, which stood there before roads were laid out and houses constructed, have been carefully preserved ; they line the roads and lend shade and beauty to the open spaces in the middle of which they stand, and from which the streets branch off. Patches of garden-ground filled with flowers are in front of most of the houses, and the abundance of trees and flowers prevents Westbourne having that town look which is the chief drawback of Brighton.

Mrs. Argoll not only thought Westbourne

beautiful, but she felt at her ease there, being more at home than in Palace Gardens. She had visited it very often, always returning with pleasure and leaving it with regret. Her suite of rooms in the Cavendish Hotel seemed as much her own as any in her husband's house. She liked them better in one respect. She might keep the gas burning in them all night without any complaint being made, or any other notice being taken than an extra charge in the bill, which she did not begrudge.

Mrs. Argoll always had a carriage at her disposal, but she seldom made use of it. Her besetting dread was lest she should become too stout, and she walked in order that her health might continue good and her waist small. By taking plenty of regular exercise, she had no need for pill or potion. Indeed, she had never swallowed one of the pills which she ardently recommended as specifics. She was too enthusiastic a doctor ever to take any of her own medicine. The wise and experienced physician delights to prescribe for everybody except himself. When

really ill, he becomes a patient, and is doctored in turn.

Having often visited Westbourne, and stayed there for many weeks at a time, Mrs. Argoll had gradually formed a small circle of acquaintances amongst the regular inhabitants and those who, like herself, returned there again and again. Amongst the latter were some of her husband's City friends, who were pleased to meet her and cultivate her society. As her manner was, she sought out the poor and suffering, and did her best to relieve them. She had a few old pensioners who looked forward to seeing her with the same confidence that they did to see the sun rise. During her residence in London she regularly forwarded to the vicar of Saint Cuthbert the sums which helped to render the lives of her pensioners a little less dreary and hard.

Mrs. Argoll had more money at her command when in Westbourne than when in London. At home her husband gave strict personal attention to the weekly bills. He never refused to let her have any reasonable

amount, but she had always to ask him for money and explain what she wanted it for; whenever she said that her intention was to spend the whole or a part in charity, he was apt to protest against her bad habit of pauperizing so many people. Mr. Argoll was indisposed to give anything away. He was too rich to be charitable. No one, he used to argue, gave him anything—why, then, should he give something to others? It was not easy to return an answer to this question which he accounted satisfactory, the truth being that he was only too anxious to have an excuse for keeping his purse-strings closed. He was cursed with the rich man's avarice.

When Mrs. Argoll was at Westbourne she received whatever money she required without applying to her husband, Mr. Byker or Mr. Bandol being entrusted with the duty of forwarding to her any sum which she might ask for. Hence she was able, whilst at Westbourne, to be generous without having to submit to admonition or reproof. One of her pensioners was always called Mrs. Argoll's

old woman. Her name was Betty Simmons. She was a widow, and she had neither friend nor relation when Mrs. Argoll first met her staggering along the road under the burden of some sticks which she had gathered. Mrs. Argoll took compassion on the decrepid old woman, and learned from her lips that she preferred death to accepting relief from the parish. Yet Betty had no objection to take anything a kind lady chose to give her, and she gradually became almost entirely dependent upon Mrs. Argoll. According to Betty, her age was very great; she was nearly a hundred; how near to her century she might be was not clearly known.

A very old and withered woman is nearly as great an object of interest as one who is very handsome and young. Betty Simmons was one of the sights of Westbourne, scarcely a day passing during the summer season without one out of the many persons who walk to Beechy Head stopping at her cottage on the way. To each visitor Betty sounded Mrs. Argoll's praises, and thus the latter acquired a notoriety

which, whilst not distasteful to her, as no woman objects to play the part of Lady Bountiful, had the drawback of entailing applications for relief by the score. If Mr. Argoll had objected to almsgiving on the ground that the more one gives the more one is importuned for help, he would have raised an objection which has greater plausibility than that which he deemed sufficient. The more money Mrs. Argoll distributed amongst the poor, the larger was the number of indigent people who held that they had a claim upon her purse. 'Give me something because you have given something to him or her,' is thought by the poor of all countries to be a perfectly legitimate demand, and one which it would be wrong to resist.

Though Mrs. Argoll had a sincere affection for her niece, yet she could not excuse Miss Tacon's dislike to helping her in good works. Miss Tacon had no vocation for philanthropy. She objected to visiting the poor and comforting the afflicted, greatly preferring to stay at home reading

silly books, or going to Derbyshire Park and playing lawn tennis. Of course she accompanied her aunt when desired, but a young lady who does anything against the grain can always make another recognise that she is a minor martyr. Mrs. Argoll reasoned with her niece, but in vain.

'You know, aunt,' was the invariable reply, 'I cannot bear bad smells; they always make me sick, and the poor do smell most horribly.'

Her aunt was shocked to hear such an avowal of fastidiousness, and replied:

'Ella, dear, it is very wrong of you to go on in that way; besides, the smells you speak of would not seem at all unpleasant if you took an interest in the work. We never know what we may come to, and you ought really to try and be of some use in the world.'

'Well, aunt, I should like to do good, but I don't see why anyone should be made uncomfortable without reason. Why can't you send the money to the people instead of going yourself?'

In addition to a repugnance to visiting the poor, Miss Tacon did not share her aunt's passion for the clergy. When at Palace Gardens, Mrs. Argoll saw little of the clergy out of church, as her husband, though a regular church-goer, did not care to invite any of them to his house. His reason was a dread lest his wife might form too great an admiration for them, and be disposed to contribute too often to the funds which they were always raising. He restricted his own contributions to the lowest possible point. At Westbourne, however, Mrs. Argoll was on terms of close intimacy with the resident and visiting clergymen. The Reverend Paul Madron, the vicar of Saint Cuthbert, was her ally in relieving the needy and distressed. He was an aged and infirm man, who, on this occasion, was absent in Switzerland for the sake of his health. Some of the visitors and residents wished that he might never come back, and that the Reverend Basil Tepper, his curate, might succeed him. Others had a great dislike to the curate and a strong love for the vicar.

Indeed, there were two parties in Westbourne whose antagonism was solely caused by a divergence of opinion about the two clergymen at Saint Cuthbert. The men themselves were on the best of terms, but their flock did not consider it unseemly to squabble over them and their ways. The vicar was an old man, with old-fashioned notions; the curate was less than half his age, and was imbued with the spirit of change. The vicar was emphatically a man of peace, one who liked the things which had lasted his time, and to which he had grown accustomed; the curate was never so happy as when he was the cause of discussion and dispute. He had no wish to stir up strife; on the contrary, he professed to be as truly a man of peace as the vicar; but, then, he could not submit to countenance that which was contrary to his own fancy, or which, as he put it, was not in accordance with the practice of the Primitive Church.

The vicar was as good and as thorough a Churchman as his curate, but he was not given to proclaim the fact with the same

emphasis, and he abounded in that charity towards Nonconformists in which his curate was lacking. Mr. Madron thought it a sign of good feeling and good taste when, at a public festivity, the toast of 'The Clergy of all denominations' was proposed and drunk; Mr. Tepper regarded such a toast as an intolerable scandal, if not a sin. It would require too much space to set forth in detail the differences between the two men; their characters and experiences would repay a longer study than can now be given to them; but, for the present, the foregoing references will suffice to show why those who were devotedly attached to the vicar should not be equally impressed with his curate, and why the admirers of the curate accounted the vicar a worthy but weak old man. Mrs. Argoll was devoted to the Reverend Paul Madron; he fulfilled her ideal of a parish priest. During her previous visits to Westbourne he had been there also; now she had the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the Reverend Basil Tepper.

It was not long before the energy of the

curate in 'working the parish' excited Mrs. Argoll's admiration, and, whilst retaining her liking for his venerable superior, she began to think highly of him. She thought that if Miss Tacon and he were to know each other, his precept and example might have some effect upon her, and rouse her from her apathy with regard to the poor and the sick.

Lest any project of marriage might be supposed to have entered Mrs. Argoll's mind, it should be added that Mr. Tepper was not more constant in upholding the supremacy of the Church than in proclaiming the superiority of a celibate clergy. A priest should never marry, was his decision. He thought the Church of Rome was quite right in prohibiting the marriage of the clergy, though wrong on many other points, and he refused to join the party which advocated union with the Greek Church because the clergy of that Church were permitted to marry once.

Though Mr. Tepper's conscientious objection to marrying was well known, he was

none the less the idol of young ladies, each of whom believed that she had been sent into the world to be a good wife to him. Had he been a priest of the Romish Church, no female members of his flock would have regarded him as a possible husband and father; whilst all priests are men, a Roman Catholic priest is a man with a difference; he really labours under a certain disability whilst exercising, or professing to enjoy, a peculiar privilege. Sydney Smith made unhallowed fun of a bishop in love, and exercised his ingenuity in devising a method for his popping the question. A Roman Catholic priest can never be personally concerned in such a matter, yet the most vehement celibate who is a Church of England clergyman may, at any moment, be the victim of a dilemma when his views with regard to marriage fill one scale and a fascinating young girl is in the other.

Being resolved never to marry, and having devoted himself heart and soul to the Church, the Reverend Basil Tepper felt that he could treat a young girl as a father, and

give her sound advice without fear of any consequences or controversy. He did his best to instil proper notions into Miss Tacon's mind. He met her arguments, which, after all, were idle prejudices, with others which he considered convincing and conclusive. Still, she always recurred to her initial objection, after seeming to be impressed with his reasoning, that she did not like the smell of poor people, and that she did not see why she should trouble herself about them.

The greater the difficulty in bringing Miss Tacon round to his own way of thinking, the more vigorous were Mr. Tepper's appeals to her. Her state of mind interested as well as grieved him. He had never before failed in persuading any one of the fairer sex to assent to his propositions. On the contrary, he had found the process of conviction far too easy.

'Oh! Mr. Tepper, I shall only be too pleased to do what you suggest;' or, 'Oh! Mr. Tepper, I am so much obliged to you for telling me what to do,' was the form

which the answer nearly always took whenever he had to request any female member of the congregation to take some part in the business of the church or the parish. Had Miss Tacon simply said 'No,' he would have been less troubled and annoyed. He would then have changed his tactics and brought other arguments to bear. As it was, however, she assented to all his statements, and then recurred to her original objections as if nothing had been said on his part or admitted upon hers.

Without intending to flirt with him, and, indeed, never dreaming of such a thing, Miss Tacon made a peculiar and unexpected impression upon Mr. Tepper. She made him feel his superiority.

'Of course you know these things far better than I do;' or, 'I'm sure I never met anyone like you before,' was the phrase which frequently fell from her lips, and flattered his self-love. A priest of any church does not object, any more than a layman, to be placed upon a pinnacle of excellence by a young and attractive girl. Human

nature appreciates flattery the most when protesting against it.

Now, though continuing to take no share in the work of the parish, and though only accompanying her aunt because she was asked to do so, Miss Tacon began to be more regular in church-going, seldom missing a service, and appearing to delight in being present. Her attendance at the morning and evening service on Sunday would not have attracted Mr. Tepper's notice; but when she formed one out of the small number who attended Saint Cuthbert's every morning during the week, he could not help noticing her. Naturally he was gratified, and fancied that his teaching was bearing fruit. It is always pleasant to persuade one's fellow-creatures to do what one accounts right, and when the fellow-creature is as beautiful as Miss Tacon there is a special charm in the task.

'Well, Mrs. Argoll,' said Mr. Tepper, when conversing with her about a fortnight after she had confided her wishes to him, 'I must say that I think you will soon be per-

fectly satisfied with your niece. She is getting to understand the case which I have put before her.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' was the reply; Mrs. Argoll added after a short pause, 'I fear, however, Mr. Tepper, that Ella is still far from being quite satisfactory. When I gave her the option yesterday of going with me to see poor Betty Simmons, or to play lawn tennis with her friend Miss Jones at Derbyshire Park, she said she would rather play lawn tennis. Now that was not right, but what am I to do?'

'Have patience, dear Mrs. Argoll; I think your niece only requires a little gentle management. I see my way clearly. She attends early service regularly, and that is a good sign.'

'I thought so at first; but when I spoke to her about it, and said how pleased I was with her for doing so, because I like to see her take an interest in anything, though, as you know, I don't approve of early services myself—Mr. Madron says they are innovations—she told me she liked getting

up in the morning, and that going to church gave her an object.'

'Let us hope, Mrs. Argoll, that your niece will soon do on principle what she now professes to do from a meaner motive, and let me add that I hope you may yourself think differently as regards early services. Mr. Madron is a most estimable man, but he is sadly ignorant of the practice of the Primitive Church.'

'I told him so, Mr. Tepper, one day after you said the same thing to me, and his answer was that he was not educated in the Primitive Church, but in the Anglican Church of the Fathers.'

'Well, we need not discuss these matters at present, Mrs. Argoll;' and as he said this Miss Tacon entered the room.

Mr. Tepper left the Cavendish Hotel in a less satisfied frame of mind than when he entered it; he found that his opinions with regard to Miss Tacon were too rose-coloured. Still, he did not despair of bringing her into a more satisfactory frame of mind, and he redoubled his efforts to

mould her views into harmony with his own.

Opposition to his views always stimulated Mr. Tepper to greater efforts in diffusing and upholding them, and the more reluctant Miss Tacon was to accept his teaching and act upon it, the more determined did he become to persuade and prevail. He preached at her from the pulpit, as well as lectured her in private, and a sermon which he prepared to meet such a case as hers was accounted one of the most effective which he had delivered.

It was in the pulpit, indeed, that the curate had the greatest advantage over the vicar. Mr. Madron was a man whose genial talk and presence rendered him a most acceptable companion, and produced a most pleasing impression upon everyone with whom he came into contact. Yet, like many devout and kindly men, he was a dry and ineffective preacher. When he entered the pulpit he became a stick. His manner was cold, his voice was weak ; and though the substance of his sermons was excellent,

everybody seemed pleased, himself included, when one of them came to an end.

Mr. Tepper, on the other hand, had many of the orator's gifts. His voice was powerful and melodious. He was thoroughly in earnest, and it was impossible to listen to him without feeling that he was no ordinary man. He was tall and slender, and he looked commanding in the pulpit. The greatest orators are almost necessarily good actors, their gestures suiting and emphasizing their utterances. As Mr. Tepper could recall nearly everything that he had written, he was not obliged to read his sermon slavishly, only requiring to glance occasionally at the manuscript. Thus, whilst delivering his sermon, he could look the congregation in the face, and by so doing he commanded their attention to an extent which is impossible when a preacher keeps his head bent over the sermon which he laboriously reads from a badly-written manuscript.

It would be unjust to say that Mr. Tepper composed his sermon solely with a view to

influence Miss Tacon. He was too highly impressed with his divine mission to think or act as if his position were to be turned to any personal account, or used in order to achieve a personal triumph. Still, the most earnest clergyman is not wholly free from human feelings and weaknesses; he may think himself the superior of his fellows and act accordingly; nevertheless, he would be recreant to his mission if he used his position solely to gain a private advantage. It was, then, not as a result of an appointed or a chosen opportunity, but as a part of the line which he had taken and followed, that Mr. Tepper's sermon seemed to meet the case of Miss Tacon and to overcome her objections to the course of action which he had pointed out to her as the right one to follow, and had done so in vain.

To quote the sermon at length might not conduce to edification. Mackworth Praed wrote that 'many people read a song who will not read a sermon.' Perhaps it would be more correct to say that many would prefer anything, even a Blue-book, to

the finest sermon ever written and printed. The speech of the greatest statesman or the sermon of the greatest preacher cannot produce half the effect in print and divorced from the place in which it was delivered, that it did at the time when an entranced audience palpitated in response to his eloquence. Yet it may not be improper or inappropriate to give an outline of what Mr. Tepper said.

The text was taken from the words of Saint Paul to the Philippians, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.'

'These words,' Mr. Tepper said, 'were written by Saint Paul when he might have seemed justified in exulting over having fought the good fight, and when he might fairly have held that his reward was sure. Though the Apostle had done so much, he accounted the end as afar off, and he was still striving towards that perfection which he was conscious of not having attained. Others may have admired his strength, yet he was painfully aware of his frailty.'

Mr. Tepper went on to enlarge on the theme that, whilst yet good works avail little of themselves, they might well help to train us for the never-ceasing struggle to win a heavenly crown, and that those who systematically practised them were more likely to be treading the heavenward path than those who did not. He set forth the marvellous spiritual benefits which accrued from practising the virtues of charity and long-suffering; he contended that thoughtfulness and care for others conduced to the suppression of egotism and selfishness in one's own person, and he maintained that those who were the most persistent in well-doing were better citizens of this world, and the best candidates for another. Several of his remarks and illustrations were identical with those which he had often used in conversation with Miss Tacon. She recognised the familiar phrases, and she was more struck with them when uttered from the pulpit than she had been when they were addressed to her alone. Never before had she been so greatly

moved by Mr. Tepper, and so much inclined to give heed to his exhortations and devote herself to the course of life which he counselled.

The other members of the congregation were greatly impressed also, but they did not take the words and advice so much to heart as Miss Tacon. Still, the preacher produced a greater and more lasting effect than he had ever done before. He spoke not only as one who had authority, and who believed in the sacredness of his mission, but also as one who was pleading a cause which he was resolved to gain, and in which success would yield him extreme gratification. It was with a sigh of relief from a tension which had become almost intolerable that the whole congregation heard the last of Mr. Tepper's well-chosen and stirring words.

Miss Tacon had never before regarded Mr. Tepper in the same light which she did on the evening of the day that he preached this sermon. She felt disposed to accede to all his suggestions; she was inclined to do so if it

were only to please him ; but she could not make up her mind. On the following morning the preacher's words had not wholly ceased to operate, even though she was no longer under the wand of the enchanter.

Mr. Tepper had seldom a moment to spare from his parish duties ; but when Mrs. Argoll requested him to go with her for a drive on the Monday afternoon, he readily consented. He was tired, and he thought that a few hours' rest would enable him to resume his accustomed round of labour. The party, which consisted of himself, Mrs. Argoll and her niece, drove towards Beachy Head. Mrs. Argoll did not care to leave the carriage when the point was reached at which those who wish to go to the verge of the cliff proceed on foot. Mr. Tepper proposed going to see the view ; Miss Tacon accepted the invitation to accompany him, and Mrs. Argoll said :

'Well, then, if you young people don't mind a walk, I shall drive back and stop at Betty Simmons', and you can follow and join me there.'

As the young people raised no objection, the plan proposed by Mrs. Argoll was followed.

On the way back Mr. Tepper remarked :

'Miss Tacon, I saw you in church yesterday.'

Her reply, which was delivered in a manner to which no words can do justice, was to the effect :

'Yes, Mr. Tepper, I was ; and I have never been so glad to have been there before. Your sermon kept me awake the greater part of the night. I now feel that I should so like to do good !'

She spoke in a perfectly natural strain, and she had no motive for couching her words in a form which was sweet to the ears of her hearer. He looked at her with pleasure ; she had turned her face towards his as if she wished for further enlightenment. He had often looked upon that face and admired it. He had good reason to do so. Yet never till that moment had it appeared so pretty and beseeching.

'Miss Tacon,' he began in accents which

were perfectly natural, 'you should not speak in such terms. I hope, however, that flattery has no effect upon me when it is directed to my priestly duties. I am but a weak and humble servant of the Church. I have no right to feel elated by praise even from one whom I value so much as I do you.'

Mr. Tepper did not mean to speak, as he had done, with the passion of an ardent lover. His intention was to reject Miss Tacon's praise in a somewhat curt style; but when he gazed upon her face and saw her eyes turned wistfully toward his, he almost unconsciously employed impassioned language in answer to her.

She replied:

'Oh, Mr. Tepper, what a wonderful preacher you are! I could have listened to you for hours. I really must go to the hospital the next day my aunt goes, and I shall do what I can for the poor people.'

Miss Tacon's words produced an effect which she never intended, though it was not so much the words themselves as her look and tone which gave them an in-

stantaneous power. The words and look acted like sparks falling upon tinder. Instead of simply and coldly replying that he was gratified at the impression produced by his sermon, Mr. Tepper exclaimed :

'Dear Miss Tacon, if you would become my wife we might carry on together the work which I am glad to think you now value.'

At the moment these words were spoken the two were moving down the slope, and Miss Tacon had put her hand in Mr. Tepper's arm for support.

She stopped suddenly, and nearly fell as she did so, when he had ceased to speak. A flush overspread her face, and it was succeeded by deathly pallor. He was startled and afraid, as he remarked her look.

'Pray don't speak, if you feel uncomfortable,' were his first words to her ; indeed, he had regained his presence of mind, and felt angry with himself for having momentarily lost it and suffered words to pass his lips which, in a cooler moment, would never have found vent.

'Please, Mr. Tepper, let us turn into Betty Simmons' cottage, which is at the corner. I think my aunt will wonder what has become of us.'

He did not wish her to say more, and yet he felt that he ought to ask for an answer. A man who requests a woman to be his wife cannot well allow the question to be treated with absolute indifference. Though not desirous of Miss Tacon saying, 'Yes,' Mr. Tepper was still anxious that she should say something decisive. Hence he said:

'I hope that I have not offended you.'

'Not at all,' was the emphatic reply. Indeed, no woman is offended by being asked in marriage by any man who is in the possession of all his limbs and his senses, though many women are annoyed by not being asked to marry the man they love. After a brief pause, Miss Tacon added, 'You are very good and considerate, Mr. Tepper; please don't be angry if I say that I can never marry you; but I hope to learn from you how to do good. I really wish you to teach me.'

'I am always at your service, Miss Tacon, and, if you will kindly forget what has just passed, we shall, perhaps, understand each other all the better hereafter.'

As he said this, and received Miss Tacon's assent, the cottage of Betty Simmons was reached, and there was an end to this confidential talk.

The feelings of Mr. Tepper on returning to his lodgings that evening were of a mixed kind. He was out of temper with himself for having given way to a momentary impulse, yet he was mortified that he should have been met with a flat refusal from Miss Tacon. Had she accepted him, he might not have been perfectly happy. What he should do, so far as Mrs. Argoll was concerned, gave him matter for anxious reflection. He had no reason to think that Miss Tacon would keep it a secret that she had received an offer from him, and he came to the conclusion that he had better intimate to Mrs. Argoll the fact of his proposal, and thus deprive her of any excuse for charging him afterwards with underhand dealing. Ac-

cordingly, he sat down and wrote this note, which he resolved to leave at the Cavendish Hotel on the following day :

'My dear Mrs. Argoll,

'I think it my duty to inform you that I have made a proposal of marriage to your niece, and that she has not thought fit to entertain it favourably. In these circumstances I think it may be better that I should not continue my visits to you for the present. Of course, if you should desire to see me, I shall always be ready and willing to obey your summons. Believe me to be very faithfully yours,

'Basil Tepper.'

It was after breakfast the next day that Mrs. Argoll received this note. She was in her bedroom at the time, and after reading it, she returned to the sitting-room, where she had left her niece. Her intention was to talk with her on the subject. She entered the room with the note in her hand. A few minutes before her appearing, *The Morning*

Paper had arrived from London, and Miss Tacon had looked over it. When Mrs. Argoll saw her, she was crying bitterly.

'What's the matter, Ella? Nobody dead, I hope?'

'Oh, aunt! I'm so wretched. *The Cosmos* is lost, and everyone drowned!'

'*The Cosmos!* my dear. What has that got to do with you?'

'Here's the paper; you can read the telegram for yourself.'

Mrs. Argoll took the paper, being puzzled as to what her niece meant; and she was not much the wiser after reading the following telegram:

'*The Flying Dutchman* has just reached Liverpool, and reports having been in collision with the steamer *Cosmos*, which was almost cut in two with the shock, and sank before any of those on board could be saved.'

'This is very sad, Ella; but I ask again, what has that to do with you?'

'Don't you remember, auntie, dear, that

Lord John Cardonald and Mr. Henry sailed in *The Cosmos* from Liverpool?'

'Oh, I had forgotten that. Dear me, what a terrible loss! Poor Henry and poor Lord John!'

To Mrs. Argoll's intense surprise, her niece exclaimed, in a voice half choked with sobs:

'I shall never get over it. I did love him so!'

CHAPTER XX.

THE LADIES' BATH.

'Il est convenu que la vie aux eaux est fort poétique, et qu'on y trouve des aventures de toute sortes, surtout des aventures de cœur. . . Si la vie aux eaux est un roman, c'est dans les livres. . . Il est également convenu qu'aux eaux la conversation est extrêmement spirituelle, qu'on n'y rencontre que des artistes, des hommes supérieurs, des gens du grand monde ; qu'on y prodigue des idées, la grâce et l'élégance, et que la fleur de tous les plaisirs et de toutes les pensées y vient s'épanouir. La vérité est qu'on y use beaucoup des chapeaux, qu'on y mange beaucoup de pêches, qu'on y dit beaucoup des paroles, et qu'en fait d'hommes et d'idées, ou y trouve à peu près ce qu'on trouve ailleurs.'—H. TAINE.

MISS SOLAR had visited Homburg and Wiesbaden, but she was quite unprepared for the sight of such a watering-place as Franzensbad. She had also spent several weeks during the summer

months of several years at such English watering-places as Harrogate and Scarborough in the north of England, Ilfracombe and Penzance in the west, Cromer in the east, Hastings and Sidmouth in the south. Hence, she was able to contrast some of the most popular watering-places in Germany with some of the most popular in England. Yet none in England or Germany had prepared her for this Bohemian Bath.

At all the watering-places which she had previously visited, persons of both sexes were to be seen in almost equal proportions. At Franzensbad, on the other hand, there was but a single man to every twenty women. Few of the men whom she saw were patients, most of them being escorts of an invalid wife, sister or daughter. Not only were women in the majority, but all the arrangements were made subservient to them. The principal *café* closed its doors at seven o'clock in the evening because women did not frequent it later.

Though a father might be seen taking care of his daughters, or a brother keeping his

sisters company, it was much rarer to see wives accompanied by their husbands. The wives did not appear to be either too much alone or to wear an air of sorrow for their other halves. Indeed, just as grass-widows form a large part of the society at Simla, so do they constitute the majority of the fair visitors to Franzensbad during the season.

Not being a patient, Miss Solar was the better able to act as a critic. Her aunt, on the other hand, having visited Franzensbad for the sake of her health, was resolved, with true German thoroughness, to act the part of a patient in its minutest details. She gave up her whole mind and time to drinking the mineral water at the prescribed hours and in the appointed quantities, and to bathing in the way that Dr. Gross had ordered.

Had not Miss Solar accompanied her aunt, the latter might have lived in rooms which, though good from her point of view, were far from being luxurious. Before the aunt and niece started from Frankfort, Miss Solar proposed that she should pay for their lodgings, and thus have the right of choice. It was a

matter of indifference to her whether the charge amounted to one or five pounds a week; to her aunt, on the contrary, the difference of a few marks or florins was a material consideration. It was agreed after a little amicable discussion that Miss Solar should pay three-fourths of the price, and have her choice of the house in which they were to sojourn. The result was that they proceeded to the König's Villa and found comfortable accommodation there. Its situation is convenient for those who wish to get as easily as possible to the springs where the water is drunk and to the Kaiserbad, where baths are taken.

Most of the best rooms were occupied by a family that did not seem to care how much was paid, provided everything was well arranged and suitable. Count Geierstein, the head of this family, occupied the high and responsible office of Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Muscovy. Homburg has become a favourite place of resort for the English since some members of the English Royal Family have frequented it. When a dis-

tinguished Muscovite Prince was alive and regularly visited Baden-Baden, the number of Muscovites who passed the summer months there was very large. Since Count Geierstein has found Franzensbad a place where he can recover health and energy during his holiday, the number of Muscovite visitors has largely increased. Mineral baths and waters appear to gain in efficacy, and they undoubtedly gain in popularity, when they are taken in concert with crowned heads or their favourite Ministers of State.

At the health-resorts on the Continent of Europe it is the rule to swallow mineral water to the sound of soft music. In America, where there are plenty of excellent mineral springs, music is not regarded as a necessary adjunct to the water. It is doubtful whether the frequenters of mineral springs in Germany, Austria, and France would think that they were fairly treated if a band did not play whilst they were drinking or bathing in them. This necessity is not generally recognised in England, where patients may bathe in the sea or drink any quantity of

mineral water without their ears being regaled with sounds from stringed or wind instruments. Yet an exception has been made in England as regards royal personages, who are not supposed to be happy or on the highroad to health unless the National Anthem is playing wherever they enter the sea or drink mineral water for their health's sake. When George the Third went to Weymouth for sea-bathing after his first serious illness, Fanny Burney records that, 'A machine follows the royal one into the sea, filled with fiddlers, who play "God save the King," as his Majesty takes his plunges.'

Happily, perhaps, there are English watering-places where the music of a band is seldom heard, as at others the band playing out of time and tune adds one more misery to the dull daily round of life. At Austrian health-resorts the band is an addition to one's pleasure. This was keenly felt by Miss Solar at Franzensbad. As she did not drink the mineral water, she would have found it very dull at the springs in the morning and afternoon, had it not been for the excel-

lent music of the band conducted by Herr Tomaschek.

Her aunt Irma began drinking mineral water at seven in the morning. From eleven to twelve she was engaged in taking a moor-bath, from five to six she was again drinking mineral water; the intervals were occupied in walking and eating, and, after a light supper between seven and eight, she went to bed at nine. Her aunt's chief relaxation consisted in chatting with acquaintances and friends. One of aunt Irma's friends, Frau Decker, met her at the springs on the morning after her arrival at Franzensbad. Miss Solar wondered greatly when she saw her aunt's old friend for the first time and listened to her talk.

Whilst Miss Solar and her aunt were walking along the alley between the Salzquelle and the Franzensquelle, a rather tall and thin lady suddenly stopped before them, held up her hands and exclaimed in a loud tone:

'Is it really possible! What can have brought you here, my dearest Fräulein Solar? Who would have thought to see you? And

how are you? and who is the young lady with you? And where are you stopping? I am at the Hôtel Gisela, but I find it rather a long walk; still, Dr. Bamberger said I wanted plenty of exercise; besides, the air is far better up there than nearer the springs. What do you drink, and how do you like it? I am taking the Stahlquelle this year, and baths too of the same water. How funny the water is! It's like being in a big basin of champagne! But I can't listen to you any longer now. There is the clock striking, and I have got to drink my third glass. I must run off, as it won't do to be late. Dr. Bamberger says that if one does not drink the waters at regular intervals they do one harm. He told me, too, not to speak much, as the irritation in my throat would never be cured unless I kept very quiet. So you must let me listen to you, as you know I'm so fond of doing. Why, I declare! there is the clock again. Mercy me! What shall I do? It's half an hour since I drank the last glass, and I was not to let more than a quarter of an hour elapse between each of them. I really

cannot listen to you any longer now. You will excuse me for a few minutes. I shall come back as soon as I have had another glass, and then you will give me all the rest of your news.' Thereupon Frau Decker suddenly turned away and stalked at a rapid pace in the direction of the path leading to the Stahlquelle.

'So that's your friend of whom you have often told me, aunt Irma!' remarked Miss Solar, as soon as Frau Decker's back was turned. 'I must say that for one suffering as she says from an irritated throat, she manages to wag her tongue very freely.'

'Well, Berta, no one who does not know her would think there was much the matter with Frau Decker's throat; but she thinks that is her weak point, and she is greatly offended when anyone, and especially a doctor, says there's nothing the matter with it. She also complains of debility and loss of appetite, and that is one of the reasons why she has come here, to get tone by drinking steel water, though she eats more than anyone I

ever saw, and can walk all day without ever seeming tired.'

'Well, aunt, I can only say that if we see much more of her we shall be talked to death. My ears are ringing still from her loud and long speech. What is the use of her asking so many questions?'

As the aunt and niece interchanged these remarks, they had walked in the direction of the Stahlquelle, and just as they turned the corner at Cartellieri's bath-house, they were suddenly confronted with Frau Decker, who was striding along as if for a wager.

'Oh! I'm so glad to see you again,' she exclaimed; 'I quite forget what you told me about coming here, and where you are staying, and the springs you are drinking, and the baths you are taking, and the latest news of Frankfort. It's a week since I left it. I suppose you've just arrived?'

She paused with a jerk, and looked upon them as if she meant it to be understood that she would stand no nonsense, and would begin again unless humoured with an instant reply. However, as aunt Irma was used to Frau

Decker's ways, she was not so taken aback as her niece, who thought that Frau Decker, having once begun to talk, would not pause so long as she had breath or they were near her.

'It is not easy,' said aunt Irma, 'to tell you all the news at once, and I don't quite know where to begin. This is Miss Solar, my niece from London, of whom I have often spoken to you.'

Frau Decker said nothing, but put out her hand and shook that of Miss Solar; apparently, she could not trust herself to make an observation, lest her tongue might go off at full speed. Accordingly, she vigorously bridled that unruly organ in order that she might receive some information. In a few sentences, aunt Irma told her all that was needful about her visit to Franzensbad. The clock having struck again, Frau Decker could not contain herself any longer, so she exclaimed:

'Now, then, I am so glad to have seen you. It is quite a treat to have had a pleasant chat again; I always like to listen

to you. I said to Frau Beckmann the other day, "What I like about Fräulein Solar is that one can always depend upon her telling a long story so nicely, and one has never to ask any questions, everything is so well put together;" but I must really go. This is the morning of my visit to the doctor. I shall not be easy till I find out whether there is much harm done by allowing half an hour instead of a quarter to elapse between the glasses; besides, my throat is very troublesome this morning, I have great discomfort in speaking, and I mean to have it examined. So, dearest friend, I cannot listen to you a moment longer, and your niece—can she speak German, by the way? I should so much like to have a further talk with her. You will excuse me then; I cannot help it; I must go.'

Having said this in a tone of despair, she turned round and went off like a bolt from a cross-bow, or rather a mass of stone from a catapult. Miss Solar drew a long sigh of relief, and said:

'Well, aunt Irma, I wish that Frau Decker's

throat would get well, and then she might speak less. The disease in it seems to lead her to strain it. How she manages to sleep at night is a puzzle to me!'

'Please, Berta, do not start the subject about sleeping at night before Frau Decker. She says that she has not closed an eye during the night for years, though I must say when we were together once at Homburg, she snored so loudly that an Englishman, who also complained of sleeplessness, told the landlord that he would have to leave the hotel. However, she is a good sort of person after all; only you require to know her better, and then you will make allowances for her.'

'I don't know, aunt, how it is in Frankfort; but in London many of the most disagreeable persons I have met are always said to be so very nice when you get to know them. It is something like the frightful dishes you used to give me when I was a child. You said they were very wholesome when I thought them very horrible. I really don't much care to know more about disagree-

able people; but I hope that Frau Decker will find some other friends whose conversations she enjoys as much as yours, and then you will not have to talk with her, and I shall not have to listen.'

It was in vain that Miss Solar prayed to be delivered from Frau Decker. The latter was too closely attached to her aunt Irma to miss any chance of talking with, or rather to her; hence Miss Solar was the frequent witness of interviews like that which has been recorded. Happily, Frau Decker's three weeks' 'cure' came to an end before Miss Solar and her aunt were more than two weeks in Franzensbad, and then Frau Decker started off to enjoy an 'after-cure' in Ischl. She tried hard to get a promise that aunt Irma would visit Ischl also, but she could not succeed. Indeed, Miss Solar said that she would not go near Ischl if she thought that Frau Decker were within ten miles of it. She even said that her liking for Frankfort would diminish, now that she knew this 'dreadful woman,' as she called her aunt's friend, lived and might be met there. Aunt

Irma did not like her niece's comments upon Frau Decker, being so much accustomed to her peculiarities as to think nothing of them. Indeed, she might not have thought so much of her if she had been different. Some eccentric persons receive extra attention and consideration on account of their eccentricities. The bad or weak qualities of certain people insure for them an amount of consideration which is denied to the good and exceptional qualities of others.

Miss Solar became acquainted with another visitor who interested her far more than her aunt's impulsive and talkative Frankfort friend. This was a young Russian nobleman who was at Franzensbad, not as a patient, but as an escort to his mother and sister, who were undergoing treatment. Miss Solar had read German translations of the principal Russian novelists, and her desire to know more about the Russian people and society had been stimulated by her reading. On this head she did not agree with Mr. Henry Argoll. He had no curiosity to see Russia or to meet Russians.

'I care nothing for Russian writers of fiction,' he used to tell her; 'they may be as admirable as you say, but I have little time for reading novels, and there are plenty of good ones in French and English which I should like to go through before falling back upon Russian ones for amusement.'

'But, Mr. Henry,' she always replied, 'the Russian novels are instructive rather than amusing.'

'All the worse, then; I don't care for instruction, unless it has something to do with art. Besides, you know that I read German with some difficulty, and I cannot enjoy all German books as you do.'

'I wish you would let me tell you more about them, and then you would be able to judge for yourself.'

Mr. Henry Argoll always expressed a desire to hear more some day or other; but the some day was long deferred; in fact, it may almost be called the English equivalent for the Greek Kalends. Their discussions on this subject usually occurred between the intervals of lessons on painting, when there was a pause

in the course of instruction, owing to Miss Solar wanting a rest. Mr. Henry Argoll did not approve of suspending the lessons longer than he could help, being accustomed to say, after a short period of repose :

'Now, Miss Solar, let's return to business. That's better than conversing about novels and their writers. After all, there's nothing like painting, and how many Russian painters are there whose works are worth notice, I should like to know ?'

As Miss Solar was ignorant of the progress and success of Russian artists, she had no reply ready ; therefore she held her peace. Yet she returned again and again to the subject, and her persistency had its reward in exciting Mr. Henry Argoll's curiosity as to one of her favourite personages, that is, Eugene Basaroff, in Tourgenieff's *Fathers and Sons*. What was her surprise, mixed with delight, to find in Count Paul Kataroff, the young nobleman just referred to, a man who recalled many of Basaroff's traits and aims.

She first met Count Paul at Holzer's restaurant, where he and his mother and sister

occupied adjoining tables. They met again at Hübner's restaurant, where chance threw them together. The ladies bowed to each other; when they sat together one morning at the concert, they interchanged a few words, and thus a speaking acquaintance was formed. At the time of the day when the Russian ladies and aunt Irma were taking baths, Miss Solar and Count Paul were waiting either in the large hall of the Kaiserbad, or in the grounds outside, where they conversed together.

Count Paul had lost his father a year before his visit to Franzensbad. He had been carefully educated, and nothing had been omitted to render him an attached and a useful subject of the Czar. His father held an appointment at Court, which brought him into immediate contact with his sovereign, and he was a fanatical upholder of that sovereign and his policy. Everything that savoured of change was repugnant to him. He had accepted the great reform which abolished serfdom throughout the Russian Empire, but he did so because the Czar was its advocate, and

not because he approved of it himself. He had never been unhappy whilst his peasants were in the position of slaves; nor could he understand why they should be happier when they ceased to be bound body and soul to their master.

Young Count Paul had been thrown into the company of others of his own age, who talked with contempt of the old ways and the old times, and who were the more disposed to dislike them because their fathers praised and regretted them. He read new books, and he imbibed new ideas. His father read nothing save official documents, and he was satisfied with old traditions and customs. The father set too great store upon the past; the son cared too little for it, being desirous of change chiefly because he wished to live in a new world. The days for discovering new continents are over. The modern Columbus is the man who opens up new vistas to the youth of an old one. In no part of the European Continent are more discoveries to be made in the illimitable realm of ideas and methods than throughout the vast Russian Empire.

Miss Solar was pleased, at first, to find reproduced in Count Paul the notions which Tourgenieff had put into the mouth of Eugene Basaroff; but, when she found that her new acquaintance was far more advanced than her hero of romance, was desirous of making a clean sweep of everything, and professed views which she thought sanguinary as well as startling, she began to fear him. Few women love social firebrands. Most women are conservatives by nature. They like variety in pleasure, whilst shrinking from any violation of the social order. Even in the most frenzied days in Paris, women did not begin by creating barricades; yet, when the barricades were thrown up, and the streets were running with blood, then women became the most desperate defenders of the barricades, and contributed largely to the slaughter which ensued. In most women there is the energy and the determination of a Maid of Saragossa, once the danger is imminent and the fighting has begun. Long after the last man has fled from the post of danger, the woman who was there at the beginning is conspicuous by her

ardour and her undaunted mien. She acts and looks like a fury.

Possibly, then, had Count Paul and Miss Solar been side by side when there was fighting in the streets, she would have shamed him by her wild courage; yet, when he calmly spoke to her about exterminating the Czar and his Ministers with some infernal machine, she shuddered at the prospect, and shrank from his side. Still, she continued to listen to his mad and bloody projects. She confirmed by her conduct what Macaulay wrote in his *Prophecy of Capys:*

> 'And maids, who shrieked to see the heads,
> Yet, shrieking, press more nigh.'

The more ghastly the picture drawn by Count Paul, the greater was its fascination for her.

He was fascinated in turn, but in a different way. Besides being filled with youth's enthusiasm and recklessness, he was sensitive to all tender impressions, and the face of Miss Solar became more attractive in his eyes every day. He would have sacrificed everything to call it his own. She had the power to turn

him from his dubious ways. She was touched with his homage; it was at once humble and genuine. He treated her as if she were a goddess. If an incendiary and assassin at heart, he was a gentle and most submissive lover in manner.

On the evening of a lovely day they walked together through the park, after the concert had been held, in the direction of the 'König's Villa,' where aunt Irma had invited Count Paul's mother and sister to take coffee in her room, and then it was that the feelings of Count Paul gained expression in a few passionate sentences, and he declared his love.

Miss Solar felt sad and startled beyond expression, and she could but exclaim:

'Poor boy! I am so sorry for you.'

He was her own age, but a girl of eighteen looks upon a young man who is no older as her junior; and, indeed, the girl is the more developed of the two in many respects. She has ripened faster. However, the process is at an end in her case, whereas, though the man takes longer to reach maturity, he is far more advanced than the girl when he does so,

both in the world's ways and in the knowledge of life. Count Paul begged hard for time during which to prove himself worthy of her; he promised to follow her bidding in everything; indeed, he would have been as wax in her hands. She felt all this, yet she could but repeat:

'Poor boy!' and add, 'I ought to have told you before that I am already engaged to be married. I wish now that I had done so.'

He was stunned and grieved at the speech. Such a contingency had never occurred to him. He thought that his opinions might displease her; he feared that she might have a prejudice against his nationality; he was apprehensive lest a religious difficulty might be raised; yet, in the ardour of his feelings, he fancied that all possible objections might be removed or compromised, and he was sanguine enough to hope that his suit might not be rejected at once and for ever. He thought, too, that if he gained time he might win the prize. But when he heard that Miss Solar was not free, his heart sank

within him, and he felt disposed to reproach her for having refrained from telling her secret earlier.

Count Paul Kataroff framed an excuse for leaving Franzensbad on the following day. His mother was pleased when she heard that he had made up his mind to accept an appointment at Court which would bring him into immediate contact with his sovereign. Till then, he had refused to enter into any employment under Government or at the Court.

The persons whose acquaintance one makes at a watering-place, on board a ship or in a railway carriage, may be on a familiar footing with one for a month, a week, or an hour, and then vanish into oblivion. It is rare, indeed, that one hears their names mentioned again. Miss Solar never expected to see or get any news from her young Russian lover. If she had never learned anything more about him she would have indulged in curious speculations as to his fate, wondering how different he would become when years and riper knowledge had

produced their effect upon him. It would have been better for her peace of mind had she never learned his painful end. It was with grief and regret tinged with remorse that she read a few months afterwards how another attempt had been made upon the Czar's life, how the Czar had escaped, his assailant being shot dead. The would-be assassin was young Count Paul Kataroff.

A pleasanter memory of Franzensbad was her intercourse with Count Geierstein, the famous Muscovite Minister, who occupied rooms in the König's Villa. Though Franzensbad has been almost entirely monopolized by ladies, yet a few men have had the courage to go and drink and bathe in the waters there, and Count Geierstein is one of them.

Staying under the same roof as the Count and being regarded as a rich English beauty, Miss Solar was an object of interest to him; he easily got on speaking terms with her and her aunt Irma, and he invited them to join his party at breakfast under the trees in the public park. Breakfasting in the open air is looked upon as part of the 'cure' by the

visitors to most of the Bohemian baths. The feathered inhabitants of Bohemia approve of the practice, and they attend in flocks to feast upon the crumbs which are lavishly supplied to them. Thus Miss Solar and the others had the double pleasure of breakfasting in a pleasant way, and of giving the congregated birds an ample repast.

A still greater personage than Count Geierstein visited Franzensbad, and caused great excitement there. This was the notable Prince Schönhausen, who desired to confer with the Count as to the conduct of the Balkanians, who had suddenly become obstreperously independent. Miss Solar took no interest in the business which brought the Prince to Franzensbad, being as ignorant of Continental politics and as indifferent about the Eastern Question as any other well educated and healthy English girl; but she had all a girl's curiosity to see one of the greatest men of the day.

Owing to their associating daily with Count Geierstein, she and her aunt had come to be regarded as members of the

Count's party, so that, when the Prince was invited to dine at the König's Villa, they were invited to meet him. The gratification of her aunt was even greater than hers, as her aunt longed to see, face to face, the man who, next to the Emperor, was the greatest power in Germany. Moreover, she was certain to enjoy giving Frau Decker an account of her good fortune. Miss Solar, whilst delighted to be introduced to the Prince, would have rejoiced far more if she could have met another German prince, that good and brave Crown Prince for whom she, in common with everybody who can appreciate what is noble and estimable in men, entertained a sympathy in his sufferings which would not have been keener or more heartfelt had he been her father, her brother, or her lover.

Miss Solar spoke German with her acquaintances in König's Villa, and she did so in order that her aunt could follow or join in the conversation. On being introduced to Prince Schönhausen by the Count, she was described as a young lady from London, and the Prince addressed her in English, which

he spoke with great ease and accuracy. They sat together at table, and the Prince conversed with her the greater part of the time that they were together.

She was not wholly surprised that he should speak English so well, as she had met Mr. Northampton at dinner in London, and he had told her, when the talk turned upon the Prince, that he was a perfect master of English. She now said to him, using the form of address which the others did :

'Your Highness speaks our language wonderfully well ; I have been told you did, but what puzzles me the most is to see how aptly you quote phrases from English writers.'

'I suppose you have read some compliments about my English in some of our newspapers, which, when they are not abusing me, go to the other extreme and flatter me,which is much worse. The only compliment of the kind I ever valued was Lord Beaconsfield's, whose praise was worth having, though I expected that he and his distinguished colleague would not have visited Berlin without knowing more

than they did of German and French. They both seemed delighted to find that I could converse with them in English, and, perhaps, Lord Beaconsfield was the more disposed on that account to say what he did.'

Miss Solar replied:

'My information came from Mr. Northampton, who used to know you at Frankfort. I don't think he is given to flatter anybody.'

'So you know Mr. Northampton! I remember him well, and I should like to meet him again. We used to have what my American friend Motley called "a good time" at Frankfort. Those were happy days.'

'Do you remember, Highness, making a speech at an English club there? Mr. Northampton told me that he was surprised how well you spoke English; and as he is a first-rate speaker himself, he must be a good judge.'

'Oh, yes! I remember doing so; and what surprised me most was the way in which my speech was received. You English people always seem to think it a miracle when a

foreigner can make an after-dinner speech in your own tongue. The French take it as a matter of course when a foreigner makes himself understood by them. Perhaps, if I had not practised English with Motley when at Göttingen, and afterwards with the English people whom I met at Aix-la-Chapelle, I should not have got it up so well. Practice is everything; I suppose you have had a good deal, Miss Solar, as you seem to know our language almost as well as your own.'

'But then, Highness, though a Londoner by birth, my mother and father were Germans, and I ought to understand German.'

'Where did they come from?'

'From Frankfort, which I have often visited since.'

After a short pause, and with half a sigh, he said:

'They were happy days, indeed, when I was at Frankfort. I was always fighting with my colleagues there, and getting the best of them. And in the intervals I used to have such talks with Mr. Northampton and other Englishmen, though he was the man

whom I liked the best. He could not drink as much beer as I did, but he was quite as able to sit up and smoke, and discuss all sorts of things the whole night. I wasn't troubled with stupid critics, or neuralgia, or rheumatism in those days.'

'But, Highness, you can now do as you like, and surely you ought to be very happy!'

'I have no doubt, Miss Solar, you can do as you please, but are you always happy?'

She did not reply, and he continued:

'I thought not. Nobody is perfectly happy in this world. And as to doing what one pleases, that seems the more difficult when one is thought to have his own way in everything. People seem to get stupider every year, and the numbers increase of those who object to whatever I am in favour of. Young ladies like you have no idea how hard it is to try and make other people happy, not by marrying, but by legislating for their good.'

'Why, then, do you give yourself so much trouble for nothing? If I were a Minister of State, and the people were ungrateful, I

should resign, and let some one else do his best.'

'I have no doubt, Miss Solar, if you were an English Prime Minister, or a German Chancellor, you would be popular and happy; a lady can generally do what she likes best, and can make men do what suits her, but I have no such magic at my command. I shouldn't be much better off if I retired, because I might then be annoyed at seeing things going wrong without having the power to interfere. It is best, after all, to die in harness like my venerable sovereign.'

Immediately before quitting Franzensbad, Miss Solar wrote the following letter to Miss Tacon, the first she had sent to her since arriving :

'Dearest Ella,

'You have been very good in keeping your promise to write often, and I cannot wonder that you scold me in your last for treating you shamefully. I really have meant to write day after day, and send a large budget of news; but, somehow or other, I have

kept putting off till this is almost the last chance, as my aunt's "cure" will be finished the day after to-morrow, and then we leave.

'I heard that Franzensbad was a quiet place, and it is quite true; yet I have had a good deal of excitement one way or other. First, perhaps, I should tell you of a proposal I have had from a young Russian Count. Don't start! It was a very harmless affair, so far as it concerned me, and I think he will soon get over it. The poor boy, for he looks quite a lad though he is eighteen, was bored to death, so I suppose he wanted me to marry him by way of a little variety.

'Do you remember Mrs. Rudkin, who came to dinner at Palace Gardens, and wore that queer thing, half turban and half cap, and who talked every moment that she was not putting something into her mouth? I never thought I should meet such another woman, yet we had not been a day here before an old friend of my aunt's stopped us near the springs and poured out a torrent of words, or, rather, a long string of questions. She never seemed to care for answers. Happily, she stayed a

few days only: I think I should have had to leave if she had remained longer, for she was always running after my aunt to have, as she said, a little talk with her. How thankful I am that I never met her in Frankfort! It seems that she has a dislike to call upon people, and expects her friends to call upon her. That is the best trait in her character.

'During the last three days all the people in Franzensbad seem to have lost their heads. This was caused by the visit of the great Prince Schönhausen to Count Geierstein, who is staying in this house, and who is a most pleasant man. I was introduced to the Prince, and he talked a good deal. I shall never forget my aunt's face when she was introduced to him, and he said that he was always pleased to meet ladies from Frankfort. She looks upon him as a greater person than any Emperor, or any living man, and she tells me she could hardly believe her eyes when she saw him before her, and speaking so pleasantly. He must have been very striking when a young man, though I do not think he

can ever have been exactly handsome. He looks far more stern than he is, and I have never met any man who seemed to enjoy a joke more, or who is so different in manner from what you would think him to be from his appearance. They say that he is very different with men, but I can only speak of him as I found him, and I am really pleased to have had the opportunity of meeting the great and most agreeable Prince.

'I have not yet said anything about the place, because there is not much to say. The houses are all in a park, or else looking upon one. The country round about is flat. The only thing that attracts visitors is the Kammerbühl, an extinct volcano. When I spoke of it to the Prince, he said he wished Lord Beaconsfield could have seen it, as he would have then understood what the Radicals must be like, whom he likened to extinct volcanoes. I had never heard of this, so I could only say, "Oh, indeed," and talk of something else. Then we went to see it, but were not much the wiser. Now I think I have made up for my long silence. I hope we shall

meet very soon. I do not intend staying at Frankfort more than a day to rest, and then I shall go on to Westbourne. Give my kindest love to Mrs. Argoll. I hope she has had good news from her husband.

'Your loving friend,

'BERTA.

'P.S.—I forgot to tell you of a slight adventure which we had when coming here from Frankfort. Aunt Irma refused to go first-class, as I wished, and though I offered to pay the fare she refused, saying she was in the habit of travelling second, and did not feel comfortable in any other class. I thought it best to please her, and we got into the second-class ladies' compartment. The day was hot, and the dust was something awful. Being almost stifled with the dust coming in at the window on my side, I shut it nearly altogether. There was only one other lady in the carriage, and she was a strange-looking person. I seldom speak English to my aunt, but not wishing my remark to be understood by that lady, I said :

'"What an odd-looking person! Did you ever see such a bonnet?"

'My aunt said nothing, but gave me a look which conveyed both that she understood what I said and agreed with me. I think the lady fancied we did not admire her. At all events, she looked as cross as two sticks. Now, when I partly closed the window, she at once pulled down the glass, saying, in German:

'"You ought to ride third-class, that's the place for you."

'I had bought a copy of the English *Saturday Gazette* at the Frankfort station, and had read a paper on Saphir, one of the German Jewish writers, who said as clever things as Heine. I at once repeated to her a passage in that article, and did so in German, which was to this effect in English: "Dear madam, in the first-class the passengers are rude to the guards; in the third the guards are rude to the passengers; and in the second the passengers are rude to each other."

'She said nothing, but gave me a look of surprise and anger, and at the next station

she bounced out of the carriage, muttering something which I did not catch, but which was probably not complimentary.'

The day after this letter was written and posted the London *Morning Paper* arrived, containing a telegram about the collision between the *Flying Dutchman* and *The Cosmos*, and the foundering of the latter. Miss Solar was stunned as she read it. She had never anticipated that Mr. Henry Argoll ran any serious risk in going on the expedition to Patagonia. Hence the news of the loss of *The Cosmos* was the more terrible. Whilst grieving bitterly over what she had read, there came a knock at the door, and on her saying 'Come in,' a messenger entered, handed her a telegram, and requested her to sign a receipt. As soon as he had left the room she opened the paper and glanced first at the place from which it had come, which was Westbourne, and then at the signature, which was 'Ella.' The message ran thus :

'Aunt has got a sad letter about Mr. Argoll. Would so like you to come to her.'

CHAPTER XXI.

A CRISIS IN THE CITY.

'Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder?'

SHAKESPEARE.

THE lives of speculators on the Stock Exchanges of New York and London, Paris and Frankfort, Berlin and Vienna, have a certain resemblance to those of untamed American Indians. When an Indian has plenty to eat, he patiently and slowly digests his food in his wigwam, where he is a far less interesting object than a cow ruminating in a meadow. As soon as he is relieved from the oppression of the huge meal, he again stuffs himself to repletion.

In a state of nature he is a water-drinker and a glutton. When he has come into contact with civilized men, he becomes a glutton and a drunkard. At either stage he goes on the war-path when he is moved by a sudden craving for scalps, and he takes to hunting when his larder is empty. In the event of surviving and being successful, he returns to his pestiferous abode covered with glory and laden with the proceeds of the chase.

When speculators have made a great hit on the Stock Exchange, they remain as dormant as the wild Indian after a triumphant raid and a prodigious feast, and they wait with patience for another opportunity to renew their operations. They count their gains, and calculate their chances in the enforced interval of unwelcome leisure. They cannot always operate, any more than the Indian can always eat. When no business is doing in the Money Market, they have either to fold their hands or else prey upon each other. If the public possessing capital remain aloof from the Stock Exchange, the

speculator's occupation is suspended. He is then an unwilling sluggard. He resembles the highwayman of other days on a deserted and desolate heath, where there is nobody to rob.

By common consent there is generally a truce to speculation on the Stock Exchange during that part of summer when everyone takes a holiday who can get and afford it. During this period rival speculators usually cease from troubling. Yet the truce of Mammon is not always religiously observed. Just as the crafty Indian digs up the tomahawk and goes on the war-path without notice, so do wily and unscrupulous speculators sometimes take unfair advantage of the holiday season to create a panic for their private ends.

Now, during the absence from town of Mr. Argoll and other great financiers, the minor and poorer members of the world of finance thought the occasion opportune for precipitating a crisis, and they succeeded in their object.

They circulated a report that war was

imminent, though there was not the slightest chance of the most belligerent nation beginning hostilities at that time. However, the ignorant and timid public grew alarmed. Orders to sell stocks and shares poured in from all parts of the country. As there were few buyers, owing to the absence of the principal capitalists from London, the prophets and workers of evil did their worst for a few days. The collapse of many financial houses was predicted, and a general feeling of distrust was created. At this time a special meeting of the shareholders of *The Riviera Sanitation Company* was held in order to hear the report of a committee of investigation. The gist of the report was to the effect that the shareholders would probably lose all the money which they had subscribed, and that there had never been any likelihood of the plausible promises in the prospectus being fulfilled.

When the prospectus of *The Riviera Sanitation Company* was issued, the public was led to suppose that the company had obtained concessions and contracts to improve

the sanitary condition of the chief towns along the coast of the Mediterranean. It was implied rather than asserted that the profits would be enormous. It was found, however, that the municipal authorities of these towns refused to have any dealings with the company, and that the binding contracts and valid concessions referred to in the prospectus applied to one place only, which was a small fishing village called San Cruzel. In the others, the authorities either contended that the sanitary condition was perfect, or else that there was no reason for spending money in making changes, seeing that strangers were attracted by the bright sunshine, and submitted, without more than English grumbling, to the bad smells. At San Cruzel there were few visitors; the people themselves did not appreciate drains, and the proprietor of the single hotel there would have to pay the cost of making them in the event of the Commune deciding that they should be introduced. Nearly all the capital of the Company appeared to have disappeared in negotiations which led to

nothing, or in experiments at San Cruzel which yielded no return.

The fact of one company being insecure and a thorough swindle would not be of much consequence, provided its own condition and fate were alone involved. But where one large concern is, or is thought to be, on the verge of bankruptcy, others are suspected of being unsound also. Once suspicion is aroused, great and irreparable damage is caused. Companies which are struggling have to be wound up because they cannot get further credit, and even those which are honestly conducted are little better off than those which are not.

What intensified the panic on this occasion was the circumstance of the Stock Exchange being taken by surprise. One member of it after another hastened back to town; the capitalists who had not lost their heads bought largely, and prices mounted nearly as quickly as they had fallen. The storm was short though severe, and proved to be only a summer squall.

As the excitement subsided, and the whole

matter was looked at calmly, it was seen that much ado had been made about a trifle; that some companies had been forced to go into liquidation a few months earlier than they would have done in the course of nature; whilst the one fact which remained conspicuous was that *The Riviera Sanitation Company* had been ordered to be wound up. This attracted the greater notice because many strange stories were afloat concerning its formation, and sensational revelations were expected now.

As its promoters in this country were Messrs. Argoll and Solar, and as that firm occupied a conspicuous position in the City, it was not surprising that many who had no interest in the company itself were greatly concerned about its affairs and its fate.

It has already been intimated that Mr. Argoll was not popular in City circles; all men were glad to join him in any enterprise because he had a happy knack of succeeding; nevertheless, few cared for him on his own account. The younger members of the Stock Exchange detested him. He could

not bear their free and easy ways, whilst they were unable to endure his pompous manner and acrid speeches. Nothing delighted them more than to do him a bad turn. As their time was less fully occupied than that of their elders, and as they were inspired with personal vindictiveness, they now took advantage of Mr. Argoll's connection with *The Riviera Sanitation Company* to depict his character in the worst light, and to charge him with iniquities of which he was wholly innocent.

One of the peculiar dispensations of Providence is the uniformity with which success excites malice and uncharitableness. In statesmanship, science, letters, law and finance, the man who becomes noteworthy is almost certain to be calumniated. The mere fact of his rising to the top is against him. Had he remained amongst the unknown and undistinguished multitude, he would never have been charged with any fault, though he might then be more deserving of censure than he was after becoming conspicuous and powerful. It is not till

men get on in the world that candid friends clearly detect and delight to enlarge on their shortcomings.

Mr. Argoll was paying the penalty of having got on only too well. He had his faults, but he was not quite so bad as he was now painted. He had offended many persons; but he was not a monster of depravity, as one man after another declared him to be. He was not Mephistopheles in the flesh under the disguise of a bald head and a vulgar look.

Many of the companies which Mr. Argoll founded had failed; yet there was nothing remarkable in this. No man in the City can always insure the success of every concern with which he is connected. Neither was Mr. Argoll utterly indifferent to the success of the ventures which he had fathered and fostered, for if they all turned out badly he would be utterly discredited. His own contention was that, out of the joint-stock companies and public loans which he had promoted or floated, a larger proportion

had proved remunerative to investors than was the case as regards those for which rival financiers were responsible. If this had not been true he would have been shunned as a leper instead of being surrounded by toadies and sycophants.

At present he could not answer the numerous charges against him which were current, as he knew nothing about them, and his friends were not self-sacrificing and active in defending him. A financier's City friends are never inconsolable when he is unfortunate; they have a lurking notion that when he is discredited and falls out of the ranks it may be their turn to take his place and to line their pockets. But, even if Mr. Argoll's friends had been his warm and vigorous upholders, they laboured under the disadvantage of not knowing all the facts, and of being unable to communicate with him in order to learn them. Had he been in the City it would have been easier to take his part, chiefly because he was well able to hold his own, and men are always

eager to back up those who can defend themselves without any assistance. Giants have no trouble in getting feeble folk to fight under their banner.

Few persons had got the better of Mr. Argoll in controversy or speculation. He was a very shrewd man, who had made the weak points of his fellows a serious study, and, not being over-scrupulous, he could revenge himself upon those who had offended or thwarted him. An instance of this was long remembered.

Mr. Robert Tuson was a member of the Stock Exchange, who, like Mr. Argoll, was given to aid in floating companies; but, unlike Mr. Argoll, he was a hybrid in City circles, being one half stockbroker and one half financier. Mr. Argoll confined himself to the work of finance, and employed brokers to do his business on the Stock Exchange. Between Mr. Tuson and Mr. Argoll there was a long-standing feud. How it originated neither could tell. They had begun by disliking each other without any obvious

reason. They had often been rivals in financial transactions, and thus a spirit of antagonism was excited, and they had come to regard each other as enemies. Each took a savage and childish delight in trying to counteract and checkmate the other. They seemed to glory in opposition and contradiction. If the one were known to be trying to depress a particular security, the other was certain to be working in order to raise its price. This was so well understood that people did not ask whether a certain stock were falling or rising, but whether Tuson or Argoll were bearing or bulling it.

In finance, as in politics, the man who has made himself notorious and powerful becomes the head of a party. A certain number of City men whose lives are spent in buying and selling shares and stocks followed the lead of Mr. Tuson or Mr. Argoll, and on many occasions the Money Market resembled a battle-field in which armies manœuvred under the respective command of Mr. Argoll and Mr. Tuson, both

sides striving for victory, and the killed and wounded being represented at each bi-monthly settlement by those of their followers who had made money and those who had lost it.

Speculators were likened at the outset of this chapter to wild Indians. It is the Indian's endeavour and gratification to gain an unfair advantage over his enemy. To fall upon a sleeping village, scalp all the males, and carry off the women and children is the North American Indian's notion of successful and honourable warfare. To checkmate a hated rival and to upset his schemes is accounted in London, New York, Paris, Berlin, Frankfort and Vienna, a great and glorious feat. Mr. Argoll had all the craftiness of an Indian, and all the skill of a past-master in the game of speculation. His rival, Mr. Tuson, was a man of infinite resource; but he lacked coolness; he was usually over-sanguine, and he was not blessed with Mr. Argoll's wariness. His combinations always contained a large margin for what, in default of a more accurate term,

is called 'luck;' Mr. Argoll never left anything to chance. If he intended to checkmate a rival, he so laid his plans that there should be no chance of escape.

The account of how he checkmated Mr. Tuson would require the use of technicalities which might puzzle the ordinary reader. Suffice it to state that Mr. Argoll was careful not to ignore the principles of morality recognised amongst his fraternity. These principles are not indeed very exalted; the essence of them is, to make money; their sanction is, success.

Mr. Argoll won the day. He added a hundred thousand pounds to his fortune, and had the satisfaction, which he relished as greatly as an Indian relishes the tortures of the victim whom he is roasting to death before a slow fire, of knowing that his rival had been probably reduced to beggary. A word from Mr. Argoll would have postponed, and might have averted, the catastrophe. When no other hope was left, Mr. Tuson wrote a short note, saying:

'DEAR SIR,

'If you give me a few weeks only, I shall be able to settle with you, and I promise ever after to help you in all possible ways. Though we may not agree, we might do a large business in concert.'

The temptation to be merciful was the severest to which Mr. Argoll had ever been exposed. He felt the strain, and he all but succumbed. He was certain that, if he and Mr. Tuson combined, it would be easy to control the Money Market, and that both might then grow very rich without risk or difficulty. Yet he heroically resisted the temptation with a fortitude which very few men could display. He was sustained in his resolve by the possession of a twofold grievance, and he gloated over the prospect of a double revenge.

Not only had Mr. Tuson been his keen and daring rival in the City, but he had also succeeded in obtaining a place in society

for which Mr. Argoll vainly sighed and laboured. They were near neighbours at the West End. In some way unknown to Mr. Argoll, his rival had become a favourite with the great. His house, which he called 'Windsor House,' was the scene of gatherings at which princes of the Blood Royal were conspicuous. It was rumoured that Mr. Tuson's only daughter would marry a member of a noble family, and that the arrangements for the wedding were all but completed. He knew that Mr. Tuson, as a comparative pauper, would cease to be the man whom noblemen graciously styled 'a good fellow,' and whom princes condescended to honour with their company. He made no other response to Mr. Tuson's appeal than the contemptuous one of returning his note. Mr. Tuson felt that his doom was sealed. He had a paralytic stroke the same night. He lived several years afterwards, but he was as helpless as a child, and he was even more miserable than the infant which begins to lisp and add

words to its vocabulary day after day, for his power of articulate speech had departed.

Such in a rough outline was the fate of Mr. Tuson, and those who were acquainted with it dreaded an encounter with Mr. Argoll lest they, too, might be victims of his wrath and his ruthlessness.

When a buffalo or wild horse is smitten with years and is on the point of death, the wolves eagerly watch till its strength has almost gone in order that, without risk to themselves, they may hasten its end, and then enjoy a sumptuous feast upon its carcase. In American phrase this would be called having 'a good square meal.' The City financier who has been hard hit is metaphorically in the position of the dying animal on the Pampas, the Prairies, or the Steppes. His last gasp is eagerly awaited by those who hope to profit by his departure. Some onlookers have no finer feelings than the beasts of the field, and they rejoice when a man whose position has been a high one falls

from it, and when a reputation has been besmirched.

There is a tendency in human nature which the influence of Christianity has failed to repress and has proved incapable of eradicating, and that is to repay a fellow-creature in kind. The desire is almost universal to see a man punished in the way in which he has been the instrument of punishing others. When it was reported in the City that Mr. Argoll, despite his caution, had committed a rash blunder, and despite his skill at concealment had exposed himself to a painful reprisal, there were many who hoped that his fate would be that which had overtaken Mr. Tuson, and that he, too, might sue for mercy, and sue in vain.

The well-informed people who abound in every great city, and who know everything about that which has never happened, were ready to communicate full particulars concerning Mr. Argoll. They had been told on the best authority, at least they said so,

that he had gone to Australia, the story of his going to Sicily having been concocted with a view to defeat the ends of justice. These well-informed persons said (but without having any foundation for their statement) that they knew there were many acts of Mr. Argoll's which would not bear investigation, and they predicted that there would be a great sensation when the whole truth was made public.

Less attention would have been given to Mr. Argoll and his affairs at another period of the year. In the dead season any scandal or controversy is doubly welcome. It gives people something to talk about, and it gives journalists, who are at their wits' end for subjects, an opportunity of writing paragraphs which will be read with morbid interest. Still, the case of Mr. Argoll was too trivial to supply much aliment in the form of news or much material for scathing comment. The facts were few and bald. He was charged with having been in the possession of some important information when

he floated *The Riviera Sanitation Company*, and it was alleged that he made a profit of between fifteen and twenty thousand pounds out of the company. Moreover, it was supposed that he had gone to Sicily or some other place in order to escape from justice. To these facts must be added the conclusion that, as nothing had been heard from him for weeks, his departure and silence were suspicious.

Whilst the journals which confine themselves to their proper functions of printing the news of the day and commenting upon it dismissed the case of Mr. Argoll after having set forth and made a few remarks upon the actual facts, the subject was discussed in a very different way and spirit by *The Evening Detective*. The conductors of this print differ from other journalists in having been entrusted in some unknown, if not miraculous, way with a mission to set the world right.

There was a time when the conductor of a newspaper was regarded as a simple

mortal, and he was actually a common printer. Probably he was not inferior in education to any of the divinities who now shape the world's ends from their editorial chairs. Indeed, it is quite certain that Henry Sampson Woodfall, the conductor and printer of *The Public Advertiser*, was as well trained as *Junius*.

At a still earlier time the newspaper, or 'news-letter,' as it was called, consisted of a small sheet of gossip, which was largely designed for the edification of people in the country. In those days, when the fabrication of news had not attained its present excellence, the writers were often hardly pressed for something to say. Whether all the news then given were as authentic as that now made public cannot be determined; but there is reason for fearing that the old news-writers may sometimes have drawn upon their imaginations for their information. One ground for thinking so is the following passage in a letter from Horace Walpole to his friend Mann, which

was written in 1742: 'I am so put to it for something to say, that I would make a memorandum of the most improbable lie that could be invented by a viscountess dowager; as the old Duchess of Rutland does when she is told of some great casualty: "Lucy, child, step into the next room and set that down." "Lord, Madam," says Lady Lucy, "it can't be true!" "Oh, no matter, child; it will do for news into the country, next post."' In these days it is not uncommon for the country to send strange news to town.

However, some modern journalists have souls far above collecting, sifting, verifying, and commenting upon news. They conduct investigations for the public benefit. Though the assertion may be alike dangerous and audacious, I venture to state that it is still an open question whether a Court of Justice is not a better tribunal for the public redress of injuries than the columns of a daily newspaper.

The readers of *The Evening Detective* were

gratified when they saw an announcement to the following effect:

'In our next number an article will appear headed: *Dives, a True Story of Modern City Life.* As the sale is expected to be very large, all applications for additional copies should be made early in the morning to the publisher.'

As the appearance of the article made a sensation, and as the number of readers was really large, it may be assumed that some persons who read these lines are familiar with its substance. To those who are not acquainted with it, as it is possible that everybody may not be a constant reader of *The Evening Detective*, the following summary of the article will be serviceable. The opening sentences were as follows:

'As usual, the bull-dogs of the press are shirking their duty. It is left to us to expose a matter which has been the talk of the City for some time. We have spared no pains to ascertain the facts, and we venture to say that our narrative will be found

both horrible and interesting. We may add our conviction that the evil-doers will not escape merited punishment now that they have fallen into our clutches.' The story told was to the effect that 'the Representative' of *The Evening Detective* had seen the liquidator of *The Riviera Sanitation Company*, and had learned from him that the company could never succeed in the work which it had undertaken, and that the promoters were aware of this from the outset. This 'Representative' saw a letter bearing out this serious allegation. The letter was said to be a copy of one actually in existence. In a Court of Justice the original would have to be produced, and its authenticity placed beyond doubt; in a court of journalism there is more laxity in proving, or professing to prove, a case. The rules in a Court of Law have been elaborated to do justice between man and man; the rules of modern journalism are far more elastic, and conduce better to the success of sensational articles.

That Mr. Argoll had the leading share in offering *The Riviera Sanitation Company* for public subscription could not be denied. Why, then, did Messrs. Argoll and Solar give their help to founding and floating such a company? The article in *The Evening Detective* put this point clearly before its readers, and stated that their sole object was to make money. That the design was entertained no one could question. How much money they made could not be settled off-hand. The 'Representative' of *The Evening Detective* laid down a law, or rather, perhaps, expressed a dictum, to the effect that the promoters of *The Riviera Sanitation Company* were men to whom no mercy should be shown, though they had sheltered themselves behind the forms of the law. The 'Representative' went on to say:

'I learnt that Mr. Argoll had gone away to Sicily for a holiday. On making inquiry I could not find anyone who had ever heard from him since his leaving London. The clerk at Athelstane House, who said he was

in charge of the office during the absence of Mr. Byker and Mr. Argoll, declined to make any statement. I went to Palace Gardens, and found the house closed. I went to Westbourne, and, after much difficulty, saw Mrs. Argoll; she cried bitterly, and said she hoped I would excuse her. The fact of her being in tears was, to my mind, conclusive as to the intentions of Mr. Argoll. Indeed, the general view in the City is, that he is a man who would not stick at anything to advance his objects. I am sorry to have to add that his moral character is very low, for he nearly always lets his wife go to the seaside alone.'

For a short time Mr. Argoll was the talk of the City. Perhaps, if he had known what was said of him, he would have felt annoyed; as it was, he was perfectly unconscious of being styled and regarded as 'Dives.' Probably, if a copy of *The Evening Detective* had fallen into his hands, he would have read it through; but the sight of any English newspaper was one which he had not enjoyed for weeks.

Though few of the members of Mr. Argoll's household knew what was said about him in the City, and though none of the clerks in his office knew how to ensure a letter or paper reaching him, he did learn something about the position in which he had been placed during his absence. Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc were aware of the brief panic in the City, and they had read a verbatim report of the proceedings at the meeting of *The Riviera Sanitation Company.*

As has been said, they had retained many shares in the company, and this made them anxious to know what ground there was for the allegations of *The Evening Detective.* It was incredible to them that any correspondence relating to the promotion should now be in existence. It was possible, of course, that when the company was formed, some of this correspondence had accidentally fallen into the hands, first, of the committee of investigation; and, second, into those of the liquidator. Wise and experienced men were not likely to make such a mistake; but,

on the other hand, it was quite possible that the promoters might have forgotten all about it, and Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc feared lest the promoters might have been very heedless.

As soon, then, as Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc learned that the conduct of the promoters, as regarded *The Riviera Sanitation Company,* had been seriously called in question, they sent a letter to Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani, their correspondents at Catania, with an enclosure which they requested them to forward at all hazards and without delay to Mr. Argoll. They insisted upon an immediate answer being returned.

The result was that a clerk from the firm of Messrs. Palmaro and Vilani reached the *Hôtel des Étrangers* at Nicata with a letter from Mr. Argoll's Paris correspondents; it was the first letter which he had received since arriving there. The reply was short, but sufficient. Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc were empowered to intimate, on

Mr. Argoll's behalf, that, so far as he was concerned, he would return all the money which the liquidator said that he had received from *The Riviera Sanitation Company*. Though that sum was stated as being between fifteen and twenty thousand pounds, the amount of twenty thousand was fixed by him as that which he was ready to refund, on condition that the offer should be regarded as having been made voluntarily and without prejudice. It was stipulated, moreover, that unless an assurance were given in due form to the effect that a public apology would be made in open Court by those who might be proceeding against Mr. Argoll, and that no further steps would be taken, the offer was to be withdrawn. This letter was signed by Mr. Argoll. It was accompanied by a note from Mr. Byker for transmission to Mrs. Argoll.

The liquidator of *The Riviera Sanitation Company* was only too ready to close with the terms offered. He might prosecute the promoters; but he would gain nothing by so doing. By obtaining so much money, he

could pay off all the liabilities incurred, and he could give the shareholders an unexpected if not a satisfactory dividend of a fraction of a penny. It is true this dividend was not very large. But how many liquidators ever distribute anything?

Thus the crisis was at an end so far as Messrs. Argoll and Solar were concerned. *The Evening Detective* chronicled and commented on the fact, without knowing that the person referred to had never seen a line about him which had appeared in its columns:

'We are glad to be able to announce that "Dives" has behaved liberally, and that our self-imposed and persistent labours in the cause of virtue and morality have been crowned with another triumph. Whether the Legislature and the Courts of Law should be wholly superseded by an evening newspaper may still be a subject of doubt on the part of the half educated; but that the Press, properly conducted, should leave to the Judges and Legislators nothing more than to register

and sanction its proceedings seems to us to be no longer open to serious question. We think that the case in which "Dives" has refunded, owing to our unaided efforts, must convince the most incredulous that the competent editor of a London daily journal is a true king of men.'

CHAPTER XXII.

MISS SOLAR'S RETURN.

'No peace nor ease the heart can know,
Which, like the needle true,
Turns at the touch of joy or woe,
But, turning, trembles too.'

MRS. GREVILLE.

THOUGH a few weeks only had passed away since Mrs. Argoll parted from Miss Solar, yet they stood in a different position to each other when meeting again, or rather, perhaps, they regarded each other from different points of view. Both of them had always got on well together, though the points of sympathy and resemblance between them were few.

Mrs. Argoll admired Miss Solar, and she

felt that if she had a daughter of her own, she would be delighted if her daughter were as lovely and clever, and, what was quite as much to be desired, as amiable and considerate as she. Miss Solar thoroughly appreciated Mrs. Argoll's few good qualities, and made due allowance for her many weaknesses and drawbacks. As has been said already, they had found a common ground of agreement in ministering to the sick and the poor.

Now, however, they met on a new footing. They seemed to be drawn together by the tie of a common sorrow and mutual suffering. Those who rejoice together because they are happy have no such community of interest and sympathy as is formed between those who are partakers of a like misfortune, and who are smitten with the same grief.

They had not corresponded since they last met. Mrs. Argoll was a bad letter-writer, finding it difficult to express her thoughts pen in hand, so she spent much of her time in thinking about the letters which she ought

to write, and about those which she had not written. Miss Solar had not a similar excuse or bad habit to urge in defence of her omission. She wrote easily and well; but she had an inexplicable dislike to address a letter to a comparative stranger, and she always postponed writing to Mrs. Argoll, simply because she had never written to her before. Besides, she had always been very busy, or thought she had, since leaving Palace Gardens. A young lady who has nothing else to do than to please herself is naturally unable to find time for doing that which may not suit her.

Yet nothing was said on either side about omission or forgetfulness in sending the letters which each had promised to write. Mrs. Argoll was too depressed and anxious to think or talk about anything save her husband; Miss Solar's thoughts chiefly ran upon the loss of the *Cosmos* with all on board. She was curious, however, to learn about her guardian, and she soon heard from Mrs. Argoll all that she could tell, which, indeed, proved to be very little.

The chief grounds for Mrs. Argoll's uneasiness were that three weeks had elapsed without any news coming from her husband. He had sent her a message from Paris to the effect that his letters were to be forwarded to the *Poste Restante*, Catania, and he had written to her from Naples, describing his visit to Pompeii, and saying that he was about to start for Reggio, where he would cross to Messina. He promised in that letter to write again as soon as he had reached his destination in Sicily; but he omitted to state where it was or what was its name. As day after day passed without any letter arriving from him, and as the time during which he said he should be absent had expired, Mrs. Argoll felt convinced that something was wrong, nor did the letter which she had received relieve her feelings, though it ended a state of suspense which was growing unendurable.

She handed Miss Solar the few lines which were addressed to her by Mr. Byker, which ran thus :

'Mr. Argoll desires me to say that, though still unable to write, he is better now. The letters which I have written will have prepared you for this. He hopes to be able to write himself soon. I have his permission to add the request that you will be so kind as to send a line to my mother at 16, Brixton Park, S.W., to say that I am quite well, but have been detained longer than I expected. A messenger is about to carry this to Catania. As he says he will not wait longer, I cannot write more.'

The common saying about no news being good news may be justified on the ground that it is better to hear nothing at all than to hear half news which may be incomprehensible. If Mrs. Argoll had not heard anything from or about her husband, she would have continued to hope for the best, and she would have imagined several valid reasons for his silence; but when she heard that he was ill, that he had written letters which she had not received, and that he was obliged to send a message to her through the

medium of his clerk, she was unnerved and half distracted.

'What can be the matter with him?' was the thought which gave her no peace. She knew her husband well enough to conclude that something serious must have happened to oblige him to employ another to write a letter to her instead of penning one himself. Besides, why was it, she repeatedly asked herself, that none of his letters had reached her? It flashed across her mind that he might have been disabled by an accident, or that a severe and sudden attack of illness, such as a paralytic stroke, had rendered him helpless. The last supposition gradually took possession of her mind, and she tortured herself with fancies about his having completely and permanently broken down. The more she thought of it, the more did the last notion appear to her to be the true explanation of the mystery.

When a fixed idea enters and takes possession of the mind, no rational corrections of it can gain attention or admission. The dominant idea holds its ground. The more

improbable it might have been considered when the mind is calm, collected, and capable of analyzing and weighing contingencies, the less can any contrary supposition be accepted when the conditions are reversed. Mrs. Argoll recalled with pain and horror many incidents which appeared trifling at the moment, but which were now invested by her perturbed imagination with ominous significance. One night before going to bed she had remarked that her husband had a difficulty in walking upstairs, and that, on entering the bedroom, he stumbled and fell heavily. He was an abstemious man at all times, and on this evening he had taken less wine at dinner than was his wont. She helped him up, saying:

'J. M., are you hurt?—what can be the matter? Let me send for the doctor.'

'Don't,' he said in a tone of annoyance; 'it is nothing. I have been worried to-day, and I shall be all right when I have had a sleep.'

She helped him into bed, and he went to sleep.

There seemed to be an unnatural pallor on his face as she watched him, and his breathing sounded like that of a person gasping for air. In the morning he professed to be all right, and, when she asked him to remain at home that day, he refused, saying that a most important piece of business obliged him to go to the City, but that he would return earlier than usual. He returned an hour before his usual time, and he then looked quite himself again.

The fact is that a most hazardous speculation had been pending for several days: its failure would have caused him not only to lose a very large sum of money, which he could afford, but would make him the laughing-stock of his associates, which he could not brave; and the strain upon his nervous system almost caused an attack that would have prostrated him upon a bed of sickness, and might have made him a helpless invalid for the rest of his life. On the following day all danger of what he had feared was unexpectedly removed; the joy of success proved an instantaneous remedy, and

thus he returned home in a state not only to relieve his wife's fears, but to enable him to make light of them. More than once afterwards she had been apprehensive of his breaking down again, and now she pictured to herself that the dreaded attack had come, and that he was lying prostrate and helpless.

To argue with her was useless. Miss Solar tried to make light of her fears and induce her to hope for the best; but she had not Mrs. Argoll's knowledge of what her husband had gone through. Still, her firm bearing was not without some effect. She was wretched herself; she would fain institute inquiries about the loss of the *Cosmos;* but when she found Mrs. Argoll in the depth of sorrow and despair, she bravely placed her own troubles on one side and gave her whole mind to the task of consoling Mrs. Argoll in her affliction. Miss Solar always thought of others first and of herself last. She was one of the rare and noble women to whom self-sacrifice seems to come naturally. Women such as she leaven as well as adorn their sex.

At the moment when real sorrow has to be faced, a true and noble woman appears as the 'Ministering Angel' of whom Scott wrote in lines which, though hackneyed, are none the less just and beautiful. For a woman to sit and weep and wring her hands is as easy as it is futile. The mourners at an Irish wake and the hired mourners at a Turkish funeral can make plenty of noise which is as hollow as it is stupid. Those who experience the pressure and the trial of a great calamity, yet do not allow their feelings to overpower and unnerve them, are amongst the salt of the earth; and the women who can keep their sorrows under control at a critical period are as few, and deserve as much praise, as those who uniformly keep their tempers. Miss Solar showed herself a real heroine when put to the test. Whilst Mrs. Argoll and Miss Tacon were exhausting themselves in aimless lamentation, she was ready to act and endeavour, as far as lay in her power, to learn all that could be ascertained about Mr. Argoll. It seemed to her that Mr. Byker's note was an inadequate

foundation for the superstructure of woe which Mrs. Argoll had erected.

Miss Solar began by asking Mrs. Argoll whether she had sent the message to Mrs. Byker. Of course this had been overlooked, and Miss Solar at once wrote a note to her in which Mr. Byker's message was copied. The tidings were received with thankfulness by Mrs. Byker, and, it may be added, they surprised as well as relieved her. She thought, when bidding her son farewell, that she was looking upon his face for the last time. She did not lament more bitterly as the days went by and no letter arrived, nor was she greatly moved when the time fixed for his return passed without any sign of his existence. That he had gone never to return was the one thought in her mind. Now that he sent a message saying he was well, she was cheered and inspirited to hope that she might see him again. Her gloomy forebodings were dispelled. Miss Solar's note gave her a fresh lease of life.

'Well, Mrs. Argoll,' said Miss Solar on the morning after she reached Westbourne,

'I shall go to town to-day and inquire at Athelstane House what news they have had there; you see this note has been forwarded by Mr. Louis Bandol, who was to fill Mr. Byker's place during his absence; at least I think Mr. Argoll once said that such was the arrangement. I will take my maid with me and I shall be back in time for dinner.'

'My dear, I never thought of that. Perhaps they may know at Athelstane House all about what is going on in Sicily. I shall go with you.'

'No, Mrs. Argoll. Let me go alone. You and Ella can keep each other company till I come back.'

Miss Solar thought that if anything really unpleasant were known at Athelstane House, the shock to Mrs. Argoll would be worse if she abruptly learned it there, than if the bad tidings were gently broken to her at Westbourne. Her will prevailed. She was one of those women who without being aggressive in tone, or masculine in manner, usually accomplished what she wished; she spoke softly and pleasantly; yet when she announced her

determination, this was done with a quiet and impressive earnestness which compelled consent.

Never till now had Miss Solar entered Athelstane House. She had often gone to the door in a carriage to bring her father home; but he had never asked her to enter the place where he made his fortune, nor had she ever cared to do so. The place was too repulsive externally to excite her curiosity to penetrate within.

Now, however, she had to mount the creaking and filthy stairs; to grope her way along the dark passage and to enter the only room which was not marked 'Private,' and which she fancied must be the one in which inquirers were permitted to make their wishes known. A small boy named Jaggers was seated on the top of a high stool, and was so deeply absorbed in the pages of a 'penny dreadful,' entitled *The Monarch of the Prairies; or, Twelve-Toed Jack*, that he did not notice her presence till she asked him—

'Is Mr. Bandol in?'

The boy looked up with a start, and when

he saw a lady he jumped down from his stool; this was the first time he had seen one in Athelstane House, and for the moment he fancied that she must be the ghost of which he had heard. However, as there was nothing weird in her appearance, he recovered from his temporary fright, and replied: 'Yes, miss, but he's engaged.'

Miss Solar did not know that it was a rule of the firm for the partners to be always engaged when anyone called who had not made an appointment beforehand. In some other houses in the City the partner is always said to be out, like Madame Benoiton in M. Sardou's play. That the partners should be engaged makes it look as if they had plenty of occupation; when they are always said to be out, it saves them from being troubled by importunate and unwelcome callers.

She said to the boy, who now looked at her as if she had no business there and was unduly keeping him from finishing an exciting chapter:

'Here is my card; please hand it to Mr. Bandol when he is at leisure.'

The boy took the card, and before going off he glanced at it. When he saw the name, 'Miss Solar,' on it, he stopped, and as if struck with a new and happy thought, gave a suppressed whistle, muttered 'Oh crikey!' and turned back. The name had the effect upon him that 'Open sesame' had upon the door to the robbers' cave. He shivered from head to foot with dread lest it should be reported to Mr. Bandol that he had been found reading a story-book, instead of decorously doing nothing, as was his duty.

'Please, miss,' he said in as pleasant a tone as he could assume, 'won't you come in and take a seat?' and as he said this, he raised the flap in the counter and motioned her to enter, or, rather, he stood as if he expected she would do so. Miss Solar passed within the bar. There was no other seat than the high office-stool, and this stool was dragged forward by the boy in the hope that she would mount upon it. He did not wait to see if she could perform the gymnastic feat of ascending the stool, but rushed off to the

room in which Mr. Bandol was seated in silent dignity.

In the excitement of the moment, Jaggers forgot to knock. As Mr. Bandol was then engaged in reading *The Morning Paper*, he felt annoyed at being interrupted, and he exclaimed :

'Now, Jaggers, what do you mean by bursting into the room in this way ! Haven't I told you never to disturb me when I am busy ?'

'Please, sir,' he said in a penitent and flurried manner, 'Mr. Solar wants to see you ; he is in the outer room.'

'What do you mean, you young fool ? you have mistaken the name !' As he uttered these words, he looked at the card on which Miss Solar's name appeared, and he, too, was taken back : 'What are you thinking of ? it's a lady !' he exclaimed. 'Show her in this instant.'

He was as flustered as the office-boy. Never before in his experience, which spread over nearly twenty years, had a lady appeared in Athelstane House, and that the

daughter of his late master should be the first was a startling incident. He thrust the newspaper into his desk, took a pen in his hand, which had never been dipped in an ink-bottle, as is frequently done by a Secretary of State when he receives a deputation, and then he went to the door to await the entrance of Miss Solar. She made a slight bow as she entered, said 'Mr. Bandol, I believe?' and walked into the middle of the room, which was that usually occupied by Mr. Byker, and which contained one of the best chairs in Athelstane House. Most of the chairs in Mr. Argoll's room, except his own, lacked a leg or an arm; but this wooden one was complete in all its parts. Making a profound bow and remaining standing, Mr. Bandol said:

'Pray, Miss Solar, forgive that stupid boy; he is always making some blunder or other. I am very sorry that you have been kept waiting.'

Miss Solar's mind was too intent on the object of her visit to notice any failing on the boy's part; besides, she was not experienced

in the ways of City offices, so she at once began:

'I wish to know, Mr. Bandol, what you have heard about Mr. Argoll. We are all very uneasy.'

'We have had nothing except a few lines'—it should be understood that, as now representing the firm, Mr. Bandol talked as if he were the firm in his own person—'from Mr. Byker, and the note which I sent to Mrs. Argoll at Westbourne according to his instructions.'

'But where is Mr. Argoll, and what is he doing? Is he quite well? and why does he not write himself? Surely you must have heard from him!'

Mr. Bandol had been trained so strictly not to reply to any question without Mr. Argoll's sanction, that he hesitated before answering at present; besides, he was unable to give a satisfactory reply to any one of the queries which issued from Miss Solar's eager lips. Having now to rely upon his own unaided resources, he tried to say what might conceal his ignorance.

'Well, Miss Solar, the intimation sent here came through our Paris correspondents, Blumenheim and Caradoc, and had a peculiar business character, indicating that Mr. Argoll is closely watching the progress of events.'

Interrupting him, she said:

'Then I suppose if Mr. Argoll were not able to think of business he could not have sent these orders to you.'

'I am sure of it, Miss Solar,' and he said this in a tone which showed he was convinced, and which carried conviction to her. Indeed, Mr. Bandol could not fancy Mr. Argoll giving instructions to pay away a large sum of money unless he had all his wits about him.

Miss Solar felt relieved. It at once occurred to her that pressure of business was the explanation why Mr. Argoll had not written; besides, had he not gone to Sicily on business? Accordingly she was prepared to go back and assure Mrs. Argoll that she was fretting without a cause. But, as soon as her mind was easy with regard to Mrs. Argoll, she felt an irresistible desire to

learn something more about the *Cosmos*, and she asked Mr. Bandol if he could tell her anything about it. He had not observed the telegram announcing the collision between the *Flying Dutchman* and that vessel, but he offered to go to Lloyd's and ask one of the underwriters there with whom he was acquainted what the facts were, and Miss Solar thanked him for suggesting this. On his way out he told Jaggers to inform Mr. Hutton, the clerk next in seniority, that he had gone to Lloyds, and that he was to answer any questions which might be put during his absence. Jaggers, who had not quite recovered from his fright, gave the message to Mr. Hutton as follows:

'Please, sir, Mr. Bandol says he is gone to Lloyds, and you are to answer any questions till he comes back. Miss Solar is sitting in his room.'

Mr. Hutton questioned the boy, but could not get anything more definite from him, and he remained in a state of perplexity as to whether it was his duty to go to Miss Solar to answer questions or to wait till she sent

for him. Before he could make up his mind as to what he should do, Mr. Bandol returned and told Miss Solar:

'I find that nothing more has been heard about the *Cosmos*, and nothing is expected for a week or two, as it is necessary to give the vessel time to have reached the other side before concluding that she is lost. At any rate, the underwriters have agreed to put off paying the insurance till something more definite is known.'

This intelligence did not disprove the telegram, yet it was so much better than Miss Solar had expected that she took it to mean that all was right. In his fine eulogium upon his wife, Edmund Burke wrote of her that 'she discovers the right and wrong of things not by reasoning, but by sagacity.' In like manner Miss Solar, instead of reasoning about the matter, jumped to the conclusion, with a lady's impetuosity, that the *Cosmos* was afloat simply because there had not been a confirmation of the story of her foundering. She left Athelstane House in high spirits. If she had brought Mr. Argoll

and his brother back with her to Westbourne she could not have been more cheerful and demonstrative than she was when she returned to the Cavendish Hotel and emphatically assured Mrs. Argoll that her husband was quite well, but was probably overwhelmed with business.

Now, whilst Mrs. Argoll was prepared to accept any reason for thinking that her husband's life was not in danger, she did not relish being told by Miss Solar that he was too much absorbed in business to be able to write to her, or to reply to any of the letters which she had sent. She did not wish any harm to befall him; but she would have been more contented if illness had been the reason which caused his silence. She could not accept the plea of business as an excuse for his indifference. As to the *Cosmos*, she listened to Miss Solar's story without caring to inquire whether it were reasonable or not. She was too much preoccupied to give any thought to Mr. Henry Argoll's possible safety.

However, after Miss Solar's return, life at

Westbourne resumed its old course, with this difference, that she accompanied Mrs. Argoll on her charitable missions instead of Miss Tacon, who was allowed to read her books and nurse her grief alone. The Reverend Basil Tepper was introduced to Miss Solar, and he soon found that no one could surpass her in a sick-room or a hospital. He had met with many young ladies who were full of enthusiasm and eager to do good, but who were generally quite unpractical, and soon became wearied in well-doing. But Miss Solar was as persevering as she was sensible; she never spared herself, and she never complained.

Mr. Tepper's only objection to her was that she did not treat him with that deference which other young ladies had shown towards him, and which he had come to regard as his due. She spoke to him as an equal, who might know more of certain things than she did, but who had no special mission to teach or guide her. Now a clergyman does not like self-assertion on the part of one of his flock. A shepherd would not be wholly pleased

if his sheep always walked in the right way, and stood in no need of being kept by himself and his dog from straying. Nor could Mr. Tepper repress a certain feeling of annoyance that Miss Solar never made the slightest comment on his sermons. They were really effective: they deserved praise; probably she admired them as much as anyone else, but she refrained from comment or laudation. Other female members of the church never failed to make some remark on Monday about the sermon of the preceding day, and it seemed strange that so sensible and charming a person as Miss Solar should never allude to any of them. The truth is, Mr. Tepper had been a little spoilt by the women amongst whom he moved. Miss Solar acted upon him like a tonic, and he did not like the effect.

Still there was no more cordial admirer of Miss Solar than Mr. Tepper. He resumed visiting the Cavendish Hotel at short intervals. He treated Miss Tacon in a paternal manner, speaking to her as one who required to be well looked after, and he made her feel that,

somehow or other, the result of the short love-episode between them was due to some fault of hers rather than to any failing on his part. Indeed, he contrived to make her realize that she had done him a wrong, and that he was piously forgiving the injury.

The episode between them had been related to Miss Solar by Miss Tacon, and Miss Solar's verdict was that her friend had acted wisely. She was not one of Mr. Tepper's many fair captives. He could not chain her to his car. She looked at him with the critical eyes a clever woman uses to see through the man for whom she does not cherish a tender feeling. Perhaps she judged him rather too harshly. A female critic is apt to be too severe or too eulogistic. Men are either angels or demons in the estimation of impressionable women.

Now, Mr. Tepper had little of the angel in his character. He was an enthusiastic man, of great talent, with a somewhat unbalanced mind. He had, as has been shown in a previous chapter, the gifts of an orator—he could move an assembly by his tongue;

and he had an orator's shortcomings. There is a feminine side in all great orators; they are liable to let their feelings overpower their judgment; they are oversensitive to impressions, and they are unstable in their conclusions. The more emphatic their enunciation of a given view, the greater is the likelihood of their abandoning it. They see all things for the time through the medium of their excited feelings. Their nerves vibrate, like an Æolian harp, to every gust of passion.

Miss Solar had an artistic sense of proportion; she liked everybody to be orderly in all their thoughts and actions. In a very small measure, yet to an appreciable degree, she was endowed with that gift which makes Goethe a man who is not only a head and shoulders above his fellows, but who seems isolated from them—the gift of feeling deeply without being over-mastered, and of receiving impressions without mistaking their character and influence. Such a nature is better fitted for admiration than love; yet when, as in Miss Solar's case, rare physical beauty is

combined with it, then the possessor is really a person whose supremacy both men and women tacitly or openly acknowledge.

It was with much reluctance Mr. Tepper acknowledged to himself that he had found in Miss Solar the mistress of his destiny. He succumbed to her charm whilst battling against it; he determined never to yield; yet he fell prostrate at her feet. This was in a metaphorical sense only. He never avowed to her his feelings and desires. A painful discovery hindered him from so doing, and it made him both wretched and heartsick.

When grieving over her husband's fate, Mrs. Argoll had requested that prayer should be offered up for his recovery, and at the request of her niece she desired that the aid of heaven should be invoked for his brother and Lord John Cardonald, then both in peril from the sea. As soon as Miss Solar brought the news to the effect that Mr. Argoll was not in danger, Mrs. Argoll gave notice to cease the public supplication on his behalf; but she requested Mr. Tepper to desire the

prayers of the congregation for Mr. Henry Argoll and Lord John Cardonald.

Mr. Tepper was ardent in his congratulations when he learned that her husband was understood to be well. He had shown one of the good sides of his character on hearing from Mrs. Argoll that she feared for his life, having volunteered to go to Sicily and learn the truth. Had not Mrs. Argoll been in ignorance of where her husband could be found, she would have accepted the offer; as it was, she both thanked and felt more kindly disposed towards him for making it. When she told him that it was not necessary to continue the prayers for her husband, he asked for some particulars about the other two for whom she wished the prayers of the congregation to be invoked, and then she told him that Miss Solar would be greatly distressed if anything happened to Mr. Henry Argoll, as she was engaged to be married to him.

Words are inadequate to depict Mr. Tepper's feelings when he heard this. He could not refuse to pray for and ask others

to pray for Mr. Henry Argoll, yet, if his inmost thoughts could have been disclosed they might have been accounted unholy, and it might have been seen that the real desire of his heart was not that Providence should bring the *Cosmos* safely through the dangers of the deep, but that the vessel should never be heard of again.

Till Miss Solar had been several days at Westbourne the love story of Miss Tacon did not reach Mrs. Argoll's ears. Partly by accident Mrs. Argoll learned her niece's mad and apparently hopeless passion for Lord John Cardonald. She was told this by Miss Solar, who candidly stated her regret that Lord John should not have been blessed with a wife who would worship him. Mrs. Argoll had never contemplated an attachment in that quarter; but she now understood the cause of her niece's exclamation when she read the telegram about the loss of the *Cosmos*. Liking Lord John as she did, and having a sincere affection for her niece, she would have been delighted had they become man and wife. But, as she dolefully

said, her regrets were probably vain. She was now more interested than she had been before in the fate of the expedition to Patagonia.

The party did not spend all their days in vain regrets, or in visiting the poor and ailing. Westbourne was a new place to Miss Solar, and she was interested in seeing the points of interest in the neighbourhood; from Beachy Head, where the view is magnificent, to Hurstmonceaux, where the sight-seers look upon the ruins of the least picturesque building in the British Isles. Days passed; no news came, and then their old fears revived. One evening, as they were about to sit down to dinner, a telegram which had been forwarded by Mr. Bandol was placed in Mrs. Argoll's hands. It contained startling news from Sicily.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MILLIONAIRE IN A GARRET.

'Such is human nature that some persons lose their abhorrence of crime in their admiration of its magnificent exhibitions. Ordinary vice is reprobated by them, but extraordinary guilt, exquisite wickedness, the high flights and poetry of crime, seize on the imagination, and lead them to forget the depths of the guilt in admiration of the excellence of the performance or the unequalled atrocity of the purpose.'—DANIEL WEBSTER.

WHEN Mr. Argoll entered the *Hôtel des Étrangers* at Nicata he was pleased to find it much more comfortable than he expected, or rather, not so bad as he feared. Carlo Nerone bowed gracefully to Mr. Byker, and said: 'I hope to be able to make you feel quite at home, sir.' Both Mr. Argoll and his clerk

had been told that the place was far out of the beaten track, and that they must be prepared for submitting to wretched fare and much discomfort; but this warning was not justified by their first experience. They could not deny that Carlo Nerone appeared to be a most attentive landlord, who spoke English fluently and fully understood English wants and ways.

After entering the hotel the landlord produced a book, asked the new-comers to write their names in it, and handed the pen to Mr. Byker. The latter hesitated before using it, and gave a look, which Mr. Argoll acknowledged with a gesture signifying, 'All right; write my name.' Accordingly, Mr. Byker wrote 'J. M. Argoll, merchant, London.' When Mr. Argoll's turn came he wrote, 'T. Byker, clerk, London.'

The look which Mr. Byker gave had not escaped Carlo's sharp eyes. He had suspected from the outset that something was wrong, and he had observed that Mr. Argoll was treated by Mr. Byker with a deference which a master does not generally show to

his clerk; moreover, Mr. Argoll had more than once addressed his clerk by his real name, and it did not need Carlo Nerone's penetration to detect the endeavour which they made to pass under each other's names. Nor was he in doubt as to the reason.

He took special pains not to let it be supposed he had detected that the clerk was the master and the master was the clerk; on the contrary, he was most careful in always addressing each by the name under which he wished to pass. However, he surprised both of them by the simple question:

'Gentlemen, will you favour me with a look at your passports?'

Neither had a passport, never having thought of bringing one, and no question had been asked about passports till then. Mr. Byker, playing the chief part, now said:

'We were told that passports are no longer necessary, and that is why we haven't got them.'

'Well,' said Carlo, 'they are not absolutely required; but the want of them will

probably put you to some inconvenience. For instance, if you apply for letters at the *Poste Restante*, in Catania, where you say your letters are addressed, you will be asked for your passports in order to prove your identity. Besides, the police have been very strict lately, since some strangers complained about brigands infesting these parts.'

'Surely,' exclaimed Mr. Argoll, in an agitated tone, 'there are no brigands here?'

'Not always,' was the reply. 'There were none for several years. If the police come here to inquire about the persons in my house, and if I cannot vouch for them, they may suspect me of harbouring brigands. I have no doubt, gentlemen, you are honest and rich Englishmen, yet you see I am obliged to take precautions, in case I should be blamed by the police, whom I may tell you I do not like so much as yours in London. I was never troubled by them there. However, if you will tell me when you expect letters, I shall be glad to go to Catania and try to get them for you.'

They were both pleased to hear his com-

pliment to the London police, and they thanked him for his courtesy; yet they felt uncomfortable, not because they were likely to be suspected by the Sicilian police, but because it seemed probable that brigands must have reappeared in the neighbourhood, otherwise nothing would have been said about them. Mr. Argoll made an inward resolve to leave Nicata as soon as possible.

When he counted over the luggage of himself and Mr. Byker, he missed his large and valuable medicine-chest. That it had been strapped behind the carriage at Catania, on the top of a large box, was admitted by them all; but it could not be found now, nor could any of them imagine what had become of it. Happily for Mr. Argoll's peace of mind, he had a small supply of drugs in his hand-bag, amongst them being a quantity of sulphate of quinine, which he had been strongly advised to take with him, for use in the event of suffering from fever.

There were many persons in the vicinity of Nicata who had reason to remember the Englishman's medicine-chest. It fell into

the possession of Pietro, who may be designated Carlo's chief of the staff, although, when it suited Carlo's purpose, Pietro was put forward as the leader of the band. Now, as the chest had been insecurely fastened, and as the jerking and jolting in ascending the steep and rough path near Nicata would have tried and perhaps disarranged the strongest cords or strips of leather, it is not surprising that it should have slipped off when an unusually severe bump was made against a projecting stone at a very sharp turning in the road. Pietro, who was intently watching the progress of the carriage, from a spot where he could see it without being seen by its occupants, noticed the chest tumble off and he hastened to pick it up. In the fall the lid was twisted, so that it could easily be opened. He thought that it was a dressing or jewel case, such as he had seen before, and he carefully concealed his prize till he should be able to return and examine it. For the moment he had to remain within hail, lest his chief might have any orders to give.

When Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker entered the hotel, and when their luggage was taken from the carriage, and the carriage itself sent back to Catania, Pietro hastened to regain his prize, and he took it to his hut, where some of his comrades were awaiting his return. Several women and children were gathered near the hut discussing the great event of the day, the arrival of two rich Englishmen. Business had been dull at Nicata for some time, and several meetings of the unemployed had been held. Pietro had expressed his discontent, complaining to his chief that when he worked every day in the fields he earned far more than he had done since giving himself up to brigandage. His chief soothed and sympathized with him, and told him to keep up his spirits, as the prospect of obtaining a rich booty was not, he thought, a remote one.

It was with bitter disappointment that Pietro found bottles and boxes in the chest, which he considered to contain sweetmeats, in place of the silver ornaments and articles which he hoped to secure. One of

the onlookers suggested that perhaps the contents were valuable in their way, as no Englishman would have put worthless things into such a handsome case. They all thought there was some sense in this, and as they found some of the sweetmeats very pleasant to the taste, they ate a portion of them greedily, and distributed the remainder amongst the women and children. These were lozenges very pleasant to the taste, known as *Tamar Indien*, which Mr. Argoll sometimes swallowed when he was more than usually unwell; they were very rapid and powerful in their operation. After eating and enjoying them, and feeling thirsty, the brigands tasted the contents of some of the bottles, but none of these were to their taste; the opodeldoc, of which Pietro drank a small glassful—a medicine-glass being amongst the contents of the chest—was pronounced by him to be filthy stuff. After enjoying themselves in this simple fashion, they all went to bed. Early to bed and early to rise was their practice as well as their motto. They never had suffered from insomnia, and they seldom

took medicine till they were on the point of death.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day that Pietro called at the *Hôtel des Étrangers.* His habit was to call early in the morning and have an interview with his chief before the other inmates were up. 'What's the matter, Pietro?' was his chief's greeting. He intended to scold him for not having come sooner, but Pietro looked so woebegone that Carlo felt alarmed for him. His face was pale; his back was bent; he appeared to be in great pain, he moved with difficulty, and he spoke as if his heart were in his mouth.

'I really could not come sooner, master; I have had great difficulty in coming now. These beasts of Englishmen! They have poisoned the village. Everybody vows that they must be killed.'

A question or two elicited the facts. Carlo was able to emphasize his orders against taking anything from travellers whilst they were in his custody, and he did not accept as a valid excuse the fact upon which Pietro relied:

that he found a chest on the road, and had not taken it from the carriage. He also explained to Pietro that the English were in the habit of taking strong medicine for their amusement, but that other persons suffered severely who did so; and then he told him to go home and lie down. Nearly a week elapsed before those persons who had sucked the pleasant *Tamar Indien* lozenges were able to eat their ordinary food, and before the sensations and the sounds of suffering ceased in every street and every hut.

Shortly after Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker entered the *Hôtel des Étrangers*, the landlord announced that their dinner was ready. When doing so he deferentially said to Mr. Byker, 'I hope, sir, that you will not object to sit down with your clerk? I know your English prejudices, but unfortunately the accommodation is limited, so I cannot let you have a private sitting-room, and you might not care to take your meals in your bedroom.'

Mr. Byker was embarrassed and scarcely knew how to reply; he could not intimate

that he had none of the prejudices to which Carlo had referred, nor could he venture, in Mr. Argoll's presence, to play the part of master; therefore, with a glance at Mr. Argoll, he simply said:

'We shall be very glad to eat something wherever we can get it.'

Indeed, both of them were hungry, and were not then disposed to discuss points of ceremony. Accordingly, they sat down to a plain but satisfying repast, Mr. Byker occupying the head of the table, and being served first. Carlo acted as waiter. Mr. Byker felt the constraint of his position more than Mr. Argoll, who was really anxious to eat what was set before him, and then go to bed.

The room into which they were shown on arriving was the best in the house. Mr. Argoll remarked to Mr. Byker on entering it:

'Well, I did not expect to get so pleasant a bedroom: the view from the window is splendid, and the bed seems all right. I think I shall do very well here for a day or two.'

After the repast was over, and Mr. Argoll said that he must go to bed, Carlo came forward with a candle, saying:

'I will show you your room.'

'What?' he exclaimed. 'I thought the one you showed us first was for me.'

'No,' was Carlo's emphatic remark; 'that's the best in the house, and is for your master; yours is upstairs.'

Mr. Argoll was on the point of protesting; but just in time he recalled the remark about passports, and he feared lest he might get into a scrape with the police if it should be discovered that he was there under an assumed name. He felt that he must take the consequences of what now seemed to him a piece of senseless folly; whilst Mr. Byker would gladly have declared who he was, if his master were to give him a hint to that effect.

Carlo led the way, candle in hand, up the narrow stair leading to the attic, Mr. Argoll reluctantly and slowly trudging after him. He was shown into a small and poorly-furnished room, one far smaller and more

uncomfortable in appearance than the cramped quarters which he had occupied as a schoolboy. It matters little to a schoolboy where he sleeps, provided he be allowed to lie in bed as long as he pleases; but for a millionaire to be relegated to a garret seemed a new and subtle form of torture.

Mr. Argoll had not lain many minutes on a narrow and hard bed before he felt that he was not alone. A legion of insects gave him a new sensation. But, despite their vigorous and repeated attacks, he soon slept. His head was unusually heavy; his eyelids seemed to be made of lead. He had horrible dreams; he fancied that he was standing at bay amidst a multitude of armed men; that he tried to parry the strokes which they levelled against him, but that the points of their weapons touched him in many places at once, yet without killing him. He awoke to find his whole body smarting. Again he fell asleep, and he remained unconscious for many a day.

Mr. Byker, who had passed a very good night, rose early, as was his wont. He was surprised when nine o'clock struck and there

was no sign of his master. Breakfast was ready, and he was ready for it, but he hesitated to begin till Mr. Argoll appeared.

Carlo asked him more than once if he might not go and tell his clerk to come down; but he did not venture to allow Mr. Argoll to be disturbed. At ten o'clock he could not wait any longer, and went to Mr. Argoll's room and knocked at the door, saying:

'It's ten o'clock, and breakfast is ready, sir.'

As there was no response, he was alarmed. He had observed there was no lock to the door of his room; he supposed that in such a primitive and probably virtuous part of the country locks and bars were never used; and rightly thinking that Mr. Argoll's room door might not be fastened from the inside, he gently opened it. He saw Mr. Argoll lying asleep in bed; he spoke to him, but his heavy breathing continued; he touched his hand, which was hanging out of bed, but still Mr. Argoll did not stir. His hand was burning hot. Mr. Argoll was in a high fever, and unconscious.

Mr. Byker went downstairs, and said to Carlo, who was at the bottom :

'Is there a doctor here? Mr. Argoll is very ill.'

'You mean Mr. Byker, sir,' calmly remarked Carlo, who proceeded to say that there was no doctor within many miles, and that the only person who gave medical advice was the parish priest. He added : 'If you do not object, sir, I shall go up and see your clerk ; I've seen many persons suffering from the fever which strangers often catch coming here. I don't know what you call it in English, but our name for it is *fébbre acuta.* I think you would call it a sharp fever.'

Mr. Byker could not object. Carlo went to Mr. Argoll's room, felt his forehead and his hands, and said :

'I'm almost certain your clerk has got the fever I told you about ; I told him last night to cover himself at sunset, as he might get a chill, but he refused to do so, and now, you see, he is suffering, though, perhaps, he may have had the seeds of the fever for some

days. I thought he seemed ill, as he talked strangely yesterday, and sometimes mistook your name for his.'

Mr. Byker repented him of visiting Sicily as well as of changing his name; he was quite unmanned, and was almost terror-stricken. He did not know the differences between fevers; to his mind they were all fatal maladies. 'If anything should happen to Mr. Argoll, what was he to do?' was the question he asked himself internally. Carlo was cooler; but he, too, was uneasy. He had not bargained for his house being turned into a hospital. Suddenly Mr. Byker said:

'If we could only find the medicine-chest; perhaps you will look for it again.'

The search was fruitless. Carlo did not then know that it had fallen into Pietro's possession, or that a part of its contents had caused him and others a good deal of surprise and personal inconvenience.

'What is good for this fever?' Mr. Byker asked.

'The priest always says that nothing is so good as quinine,' was the reply; Carlo

offered to go and inquire whether the priest had any.

During his absence Mr. Byker thought himself justified in searching Mr. Argoll's bag to see whether there were any medicine in it; and he had the satisfaction of finding in it a small leather case, resembling a portable dressing-case, which contained several boxes of pills, and a bottle labelled 'sulphate of quinine.'

Just as he made this welcome discovery, Carlo returned, and reported that the priest had not a grain of quinine left, and he offered to send a messenger to Catania for some. However, this was no longer necessary. The next question was how much to give the patient. After they had both decided as to the quantity which seemed to them a suitable dose, their next difficulty was to induce Mr. Argoll to swallow the powder dissolved in water. After trying to persuade him to do so, but with the only result of a futile struggle, he suddenly raised himself in bed, shouting:

'Give me something to drink; my mouth's on fire!'

He then eagerly drank off the potion, exclaiming, 'I'm poisoned!' and sank into a lethargy.

For several days there was no appreciable change in Mr. Argoll's condition. He did not grow worse, and that was the only consolation which Mr. Byker had; whether the doses of quinine which he administered as often as his master could be induced to take them had any good effect was a problem which he could not solve. Now and then Mr. Argoll seemed himself again. He then wished to leave his bed: he said that he was hungry as well as thirsty, and Mr. Byker thought that the worst was over. But, after a few hours of seeming health, he suddenly relapsed into an uneasy slumber, with a hot head and hot hands. Even when he wished to get up, and said that he was able to do so, his desire proved to be in excess of his power. He was too weak to stand upright, and he could not dress himself.

Carlo's concern for Mr. Argoll was scarcely inferior to that of Mr. Byker. He had obtained convincing confirmation of his sus-

picion that the master was the clerk, and the clerk the master. It was of no avail to hold Mr. Byker responsible for having fallen into his power. He knew Englishmen well enough to understand that it was utterly hopeless to demand a large payment by way of ransom from the clerk to a millionaire. He also knew human nature too well to attempt making a claim for payment upon Mr. Argoll in his prostrate and unconscious state. He went to church with praiseworthy regularity, and he invoked his patron saint to hasten Mr. Argoll's recovery. He vowed, at the same time, that as soon as Mr. Argoll should be able to realize his position, he would be called upon to pay such a sum of money as should compensate him for his anxiety, if not render him rich for life.

The brigands, who acknowledged Carlo Nerone as their chief, were becoming impatient and discontented, and they gave him much trouble. As no Sicilian of their class has any confidence in his fellows, each of them, and Pietro in particular, wearied him with questions about the rich Englishmen.

They owed him a grudge. The contents of his medicine-chest had made a painful and lasting impression upon them. Being naturally suspicious, they fancied that the chest had been intentionally placed in their way, with the object of killing them on the spot or by inches. If it had contained jewels or other valuables, they might have had no objection to having secured and rifled it. A rat may think kindly of the person who provides it with a large piece of cheese, till it finds, after eating the cheese, that it cannot get out of the trap.

Besides, they were vexed and irritated to see the immunity which Mr. Byker enjoyed, and they protested against his remaining so long unmolested in the *Hôtel des Étrangers*. Other strangers who had been attracted there were disposed of, as a rule, within the space of a week, being either allowed to depart after paying a fair sum for their entertainment, or else disappearing in the '*Inferno*.'

Carlo Nerone found his authority in jeopardy. He began to fear lest the rash-

ness and irritability of his indignant and unruly followers should lead them to commit a precipitate action, which would frustrate his design for making Mr. Argoll pay a large ransom. He confidentially told Pietro the whole story, and Pietro repeated as much of it as he thought advisable to his comrades; but these rude and unemployed brigands were not given to practise the virtue of patience, and they longed to do something, even if it were sheer mischief. It was only after Carlo had assured Pietro that, if he would bide his time and restrain the others, his reward would not be less than twenty-five thousand lire, or a thousand pounds sterling, that Pietro consented to counsel the others to exercise forbearance, and, if necessary, to keep them in check by making an immediate example of the most unruly. He regarded the promised payment as a large fortune. When Carlo empowered him to promise that each of the others would have at least a hundred lire each for his share, or four pounds sterling, they unanimously agreed to await further orders from

their chief, and to starve rather than disobey him.

Mr. Byker found the time hang heavy upon his hands. He wrote many letters, which the landlord promised to send to the post, but which never left the hotel; he read the few books he could lay his hands upon, and once he went a-fishing. He had often fished from a punt on the Thames, and he enjoyed that elaborate way of doing next to nothing. The small stream running down the valley in which Nicata was situated contained a few fish; but Mr. Byker did not contrive to catch any. For a great part of the year the stream was almost dry, two or three pools remaining here and there; indeed, most of the river-beds in Sicily are either filled with raging torrents or with a heap of dry stones. After one day's trial Mr. Byker gave up all hopes of catching Sicilian fish. He could see them swimming about quite distinctly, and they could see him; and he was not sufficiently versed in the mysteries of angling to know how to catch fish in a clear stream or pool.

He found a book in his bedroom, which he read with great, nay, almost painful interest. This was the copy of Edmond About's *King of the Mountains*, which had proved so instructive to Carlo Nerone. Mr. Byker shuddered at the thought of being in the position of Hermann Schultz, and being subjected to refined and terrible tortures. He could not think of anything but brigands after finishing it, and he started whenever he met a man with a long-barrelled gun in his hand and a dagger in his belt. More than once he saw such a person, and he always breathed more freely when the armed man turned abruptly away. If these men were brigands, they appeared to avoid him, and he felt thankful that, for some incomprehensible reason, they did not seem to like his looks.

Having little wherewith to occupy his time, he was glad to converse with the landlord. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that the landlord questioned him, and obtained all the information he desired. Mr. Byker spoke about the project of making a railway up Mount Etna, and he injudiciously intimated

that ten thousand pounds were at Mr. Argoll's disposal in a bank at Catania, wherewith to acquire the necessary concessions, and to make other preliminary payments. Carlo Nerone was extremely glad and relieved to hear this. He had speculated as to how he should subject his millionaire to ransom without having arrived at a conclusion satisfactory to himself. He could not follow the custom of his colleagues and predecessors, when they captured a person residing not far away, and cut off first one ear, then another, then the nose, and ended by cutting the throat of the prisoner, should each sample of his person, which they forwarded by special messenger, fail to move his friends to ransom him. He fully realized that it would be no use sending one of Mr. Argoll's ears by post to London, and asking for a remittance in a registered letter by return. The ear might turn bad before it arrived, and the demand might be misunderstood. An explanation would be called for, and before the whole business could be amicably adjusted much time would be wasted. Besides, he

wished to be secure of his money without risking detection, and without giving his prisoner leisure or opportunity to retaliate. Now that he learned that Mr. Argoll had ten thousand pounds in a bank at Catania, he thought that he saw his way clearly, and he was doubly anxious that Mr. Argoll should speedily recover and become fitted for discharging the duty which would be required of him.

Carlo still lent himself to the fiction that Mr. Argoll was the clerk, and Mr. Byker was the master, but he did so simply because Mr. Byker did not appear disposed to avow the truth.

Both of them were surprised one day by a messenger arriving from Catania with a despatch for Mr. Argoll, and with peremptory orders to await a reply. As has been previously intimated, the bankers at Catania had been requested by Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc to forward to Mr. Argoll a document which they enclosed, and to let them have his answer as early as possible. The messenger asked for Mr. Argoll, and

was introduced to Mr. Byker; as the one could not speak English, and the other knew nothing of Italian, the landlord acted as interpreter. Mr. Byker opened and read the letter; having done so, he remarked that he could not give a reply before consulting Mr. Argoll, and he left the room. This slip of the tongue did not, of course, escape Carlo's notice.

Mr. Argoll, though still as weak as a newly-born babe, was sufficiently recovered to converse about matters of business. He had been ill twelve days. A well-regulated fever does not run its course under twenty-one days, but this one was an erratic and ill-conducted fever, and appeared to have completely abated on the twelfth day. It is possible that the large doses of quinine which Mr. Byker administered may have had some influence on the result.

Though much better, Mr. Argoll was too feeble to be moved, otherwise he would have been seated downstairs in the room occupied by Mr. Byker, who had resolved to give it up to him, no matter what the landlord

might think, as soon as Mr. Argoll could be safely carried to it.

Mr. Byker read the letter to Mr. Argoll containing the information which Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc were so anxious that he should receive. It told the story of *The Riviera Sanitation Company* in its latest development, and how the promoters were in danger of proceedings being commenced against them. They appealed to him to come to terms with the liquidator of the company, and said that proceedings might lead to disclosures that would damage the business which they carried on; and they offered, if he did so, and also brought about the settlement of the last Egyptian loan in a manner favourable to them, that they would bear half the loss. They further assured him that they had good reason to believe the liquidator would not take further proceedings if a voluntary return were made at once by Mr. Argoll, and also that by doing so he would make a good impression upon the public at large.

Even when in perfect health Mr. Argoll was not of a belligerent nature. He abomi-

nated litigation. He hated lawyers and their bills. Now that he was weak and unnerved he said to Mr. Byker that the money must be refunded, at least as much of it as the liquidator could discover to have been obtained directly from the company. The total profit was known to Mr. Argoll and Mr. Byker, and it was six times greater than the amount of money which had been received from the company. Accordingly Mr. Byker wrote a letter to the effect that, though the sum charged for expenses and commission was a perfectly fair and legitimate one, yet rather than involve the company in litigation, and on condition that all imputations should be withdrawn, and that no further proceedings should be taken, Messrs. Argoll and Solar would make a voluntary return to the liquidator of twenty thousand pounds. The necessary instructions for giving effect to this were enclosed, with a view to their being forwarded by Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc to Mr. Louis Bandol at Athelstane House. Before the messenger left, Mr. Byker penned the few lines to Mrs. Argoll which caused so much

excitement when they reached her at Westbourne. Of course Mr. Byker had no reason to suspect that none of his letters had left Carlo's custody. Had he done so he would have written differently.

Both he and Mr. Argoll were pleased that they could now look forward to leaving Nicata at any early day. They had seen enough of it. Mr. Argoll did not care to make any inquiries about the feasibility of making a railway up Mount Etna. He purposely omitted referring to this in the letter to Messrs. Blumenheim and Caradoc, which Mr. Byker penned and which he signed, lest they should draw back from their offer to bear a part of the loss in *The Riviera Sanitation Company.* Nor did the possibility of becoming the proprietor of an estate in Sicily, with the title of Count, have the old charm for him. He was longing to return to Athelstane House. He bitterly regretted having taken a holiday, and having exchanged the mirk and mud of London for the blue skies and acute fevers of the South.

'I must say, Byker,' was his remark when

they discussed their plans, 'there is no place like the City, after all, for those who really know how to enjoy life. They used to tell me that the air was very bad there, but I always found it pleasant enough. Besides, I could make a little money there, and I can't do anything here.'

'Yes, sir,' replied Mr. Byker with a point which was due, no doubt, to his careful perusal of Edmond About's novel, and with an emphasis in which there was no artifice, 'I would rather die in London than live in Sicily.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CATASTROPHE.

'Per me si va nella città dolente:
Per me si va nell' eterno dolore:
. . . . . .
Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate.'

DANTE.

'Ich habe dir nicht nachgeſtellt,
Biſt du doch ſelbſt in's Garn gegangen.'

GOETHE.

IT was on the afternoon of the twelfth day after falling ill that Mr. Argoll could be transported from the misery of his garret to the comparative luxury of the room which had been occupied by Mr. Byker. The help of both Mr. Byker and Carlo Nerone was required to guide and support him down the steep and

narrow stair which led from the upper to the ground floor. Carlo treated him as tenderly and regarded him with as much apparent affection as if he were his father.

The feeling of affectionate interest which animated Carlo Nerone was shared by everyone, both in the *Hôtel des Étrangers* and in the village. They knew that the sick man's life was precious to them. They had prayed with great fervour for his recovery. They would have considered his death at that time as great a calamity as an earthquake or a flood, an eruption of Mount Etna or an outbreak of cholera.

Once upon a time a poor English sailor was the sole survivor of a shipwreck in the Pacific Ocean. The waves which drowned his comrades cast him upon the island of Labno in an unconscious state. Immediately after leaving the wreck he was dashed against a floating mass of wood, and he did not regain his senses till lying upon the soft sand with the sun beating upon his head. The natives of Labno, though savages, were most hospitable. They took him up carefully; they

gave him as much food as he could eat, and an abundant allowance of Ky Wa, an intoxicant which they ingeniously manufactured from the breadfruit-tree. He ate till he could eat no more, and he went to sleep after drinking much more of the sickly-tasting and heavy liquor than was good for him.

He awoke with a terrific headache and aching in every limb. Ascribing his pains to the liquor which he had swallowed, he formed the wise resolution never to drink it again—first, because he disliked the taste; second, because he disliked the effects. He had often drunk too much of the intoxicants prepared by his civilized brethren, and had lost his senses without suffering the penalty of excruciating pains on regaining them. When he was offered more Ky Wa he made signs of disgust and refusal. The kindly natives were pleased. They acted upon a rule based upon an old tradition, that the man who, having drunk Ky Wa once, refused to drink it a second time, was to be elected king at the first vacancy. The king of the island had

recently died, greatly beloved and relished by his subjects, and a successor was looked for with anxiety. Few but strangers ever refused to drink of the cup. The natives preferred drinking of it too often to being eligible for election as king. The king was forbidden to drink anything but water. It had been found by experiments frequently renewed that the flesh of water-drinkers was more juicy and palatable than that of those who drank too much Ky Wa.

Jack Robinson, the poor shipwrecked sailor, found the position of king most enjoyable. He was feasted to his heart's content, and, if he had understood the language at the outset, he would then have found that he was flattered to the skies by all his subjects. They literally worshipped him. He gradually acquired a knowledge of the language, and at the close of a year he could make out what was said, though unable to express himself with fluency.

The inhabitants of Labno prepared a great feast to commemorate the anniversary of the happy day upon which Jack Robinson had

assumed the royal dignity. He regarded this as a fitting homage to himself. He was quite sure that he had done his duty, which, as far as he could gather, was never to miss a meal and always to eat twice as much as anyone else. He had learned that the King of Labno ought to grow fat at the expense of his subjects. He had done his best to give them satisfaction, and they were delighted with the result.

The night before the grand festival he overheard two of his attendants discussing the noteworthy event which was to take place on the morrow, and mentioning him in terms of praise of which the substance was :

'He is a good man—a very good man; how fat he is! and his skin is smooth and fair, and his flesh seems beautifully soft. What a treat we shall have after he is roasted to-morrow! It will be long before Heaven sends us another king as good and fat as he.' These words dispelled a mystery which had haunted him. He had seen preparations on a large scale for roasting the

fatted ox; but, when he asked where it was, he was always told:

'Your most gracious Majesty will learn in good time."

It now flashed across his mind that he was to be the feast. What happened afterwards needs not be narrated now; but if the story had been familiar to Mr. Argoll, neither he nor Mr. Byker would have puzzled themselves, as they frequently did, about the extraordinary interest taken in their welfare by all the people of Nicata. They thought that these people had a special love for Englishmen, and they were right; but they had not divined the reason why this love was entertained and displayed.

Mr. Argoll found it a great treat to leave his garret. An invalid is always benefited by changing from one room to another when, as in the present case, the change is from a narrow chamber in which one can scarcely turn round or stand upright, to a room in which there is plenty of space to raise one's head and move about. Mr. Argoll had reason to rejoice. Not the room only, but

everything which he saw, appeared fresh and delightful. When he stepped outside into the sunshine, and breathed the sweet air again, he felt what Gray has so admirably depicted in the lines:

'See the wretch, that long has tost
On the thorny bed of pain
At length repair his vigour lost,
And breathe and walk again;
The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise.'

Had Mr. Argoll been acquainted with Gray's poem, he might have been tempted to say that he, too, had a glimpse of Paradise in his changed condition. He had eaten and relished his dinner. Carlo Nerone, ever mindful of the tastes of Englishmen and the comforts to which they are accustomed, had provided a bottle of Marsala wine as a special treat. He and his neighbours preferred the rough red wine of the district. Carlo thought that a glass of the Marsala with which Mr. Argoll was familiar would be beneficial to him. He judged rightly.

Mr. Argoll drank more than one glass with great gusto; and he passed the best night in bed that he had done since leaving home. He awoke refreshed in the morning.

Mr. Byker was less comfortable than his master. If he had begun by occupying the garret, he would not have grumbled, but to go to it from his pleasant bedroom was a sore trial; a still greater one awaited him from what Dr. Wolcot, better known as 'Peter Pindar,' called 'the hopping natives of a hard, hard bed.' Mr. Byker was very sensitive to the attentions of the industrious insects which have very sanguinary tastes. His mother used to wage as relentless a war against them at 16, Brixton Park, as the late Mrs. Carlyle did at 5, Cheyne Row. To him, then, it was a bitter misery to pass a night in the room where Mr. Argoll had passed several. He consoled himself by thinking that as Mr. Argoll and he would probably depart on the morrow, he would not groan on this bed another night.

Exhausted with a long struggle against unseen and unrelenting foes, Mr. Byker fell

into a deep slumber towards the morning. He was suddenly aroused by a hand being laid heavily upon his shoulder. Starting up, he saw before him one of the men armed with a gun and a knife whom he had noticed during his walks abroad. This man shook him, and motioned to him to get up and dress. After speaking for a few minutes and seeing that he was not understood, he had recourse to signs, which Mr. Byker could not misinterpret. As soon as Mr. Byker had dressed himself, he was pushed out of the room and down the stairs by this man, who was Carlo's lieutenant, Pietro. At the bottom of the stairs other armed men were standing, with Carlo in the midst of them, in the attitude of a prisoner. His hands were closed together behind his back, as if they had been tied.

'What is the matter, landlord?' was Mr. Byker's question.

'I am very sorry to say, sir,' was the reply, 'the brigands have taken possession of the house. It seems they have been planning this attack for several days. I have begged

them to spare your clerk, as he is just recovering from a severe illness, and they say he may remain where he is.'

It may be stated here that Mr. Argoll was awake and thinking of getting up, when the door opened and Giovanni, another brigand, entered the room and carried off all his luggage and clothing. Mr. Argoll was naturally astonished. There was no bell in the room, and he could not summon help in any other way than by calling out at intervals for some one to come to him. Carlo said to Mr. Byker: 'The brigands say you may go to the door and tell your clerk that if he remains quiet no harm will be done to him; but the brigands who have taken possession of the house will not allow him to leave it.'

Mr. Argoll's consternation on hearing this message was indescribable.

Pietro tied Mr. Byker's hands behind his back, and then, knife in hand, Pietro and two others forced him to move towards the door and out of the house.

'Do what he tells you, Mr. Argoll,' was Carlo's recommendation; he added, 'They

will treat you better if you make no resistance: they say I am to remain here. When they allow me to leave I will visit you.'

Mr. Byker was obliged to traverse a path along which he had often walked, and which led to the head of the valley: a small hut stood at the left side of the stream on the rising ground, and there he was driven and shut in. Some of the villagers who were spectators of the occurrence called out vicious things which Mr. Byker did not understand, their enmity being largely the result of the contents of the medicine-chest being put in their way, as they thought, with the object of poisoning them. They would have greatly enjoyed administering to him a dose of still more powerful physic.

When the brigands entered the hut after Mr. Byker, they unbound his hands and gave him something to eat and drink which one of them had brought from the *Hôtel des Étrangers*. But Mr. Byker had no appetite. He shook his head to indicate that he did not wish for any breakfast. The brigands, who had preserved their normally keen

appetites, ate and drank what had been provided for him by the thoughtfulness of Carlo Nerone. Two of them remained on guard at the hut when Pietro left it to see his chief and to arrange what should be done next.

Meanwhile Carlo Nerone had talked over the whole affair with Mr. Argoll, whom he still professed to take for Mr. Byker. Mr. Argoll's clothes had been returned to him, and he had dressed himself and breakfasted. He went to the door of the hotel with the intention of walking out, when he noticed an armed brigand on guard who motioned that he must return; he went to the window of his bedroom, which opened so low down that he could easily walk out when the two halves of it were thrown back, and he thought of going out that way: but again the sight of an armed brigand caused him to change his mind. He was convinced, indeed, that the house was surrounded, and that he could not escape. Moreover, even if he had been free to go when he pleased, he could not have proceeded far. The excitement and slight

exertion had already proved too much for him in his enfeebled state, and he had to lie down on his bed and rest. Whilst lying there oppressed by sad thoughts, he received a visit from Carlo Nerone.

Carlo was a good actor; indeed, a Sicilian of any rank and class may be said to be born with the histrionic gift. Yet even if he had been the greatest of bunglers, he would have found it easy to impose upon Mr. Argoll. The latter had not the remotest suspicion of the *Hôtel des Étrangers* being a brigands' cave formed on an improved pattern.

'Mr. Byker, this is a bad business,' was the first remark of Carlo when he entered Mr. Argoll's room; he added, 'I shall be ruined. Since you and your master have been here not a single person has visited the hotel, and now that brigands have appeared, I don't know what to do. When the police come, as I suppose they may do soon, I shall have to tell them that you and your master had no passports, and they will probably arrest you on suspicion of being in league with the brigands.'

This intimation did not comfort Mr. Argoll. He prayed to be delivered from the Sicilian police. He was as afraid of them as of brigands. He was still reluctant to admit that he had passed under an assumed name, lest he should be imprisoned for doing so. When Carlo went on to tell him how Mr. Byker had been bound and carried off to a hut, where he was to be kept, and probably tortured, till he agreed to pay ransom, he was rather pleased that he had changed his name. He was sorry for Mr. Byker; but he shuddered as he thought that he might have undergone the same fate if his real name were known.

Carlo told him that Pietro, the nominal leader of the band, had not decided what he should do with his captives, though, if he had chosen, he could have given a shrewd guess as to what course would be followed. He then left Mr. Argoll to his reflections, saying that he was told by the brigands that he must go to the hut and interpret what they had to say to Mr. Argoll. He promised to report in the evening what had occurred.

Mr. Byker was allowed to sit outside the hut and smoke his pipe in the open air. The view before him was an extensive one. Across the narrow valley there was a path which ran up the mountain-side, and by which the ascent of Etna is generally made. Lower down was the cleft in the mountain out of which puffs of white vapour issued now and then, and which Carlo had often told him was a dangerous place, which must on no account be approached without a guide. This was the *Inferno*.

As the valley wound round like an *S*, not many of the scattered houses of Nicata could be seen, the most conspicuous and the one nearest the hut being the *Hôtel des Étrangers*. Farther off and at a lower level was the small village church. Two roads led to it. The one wound down the valley, following the course of the stream ; the other ran almost in a straight line to the left of the cleft already mentioned. Mr. Byker had no eye for scenic effects; but the view fascinated him for the reason that he longed to be moving down the road which led to the

plain and to be leaving Nicata on his way homewards.

His eyes suddenly fell upon Carlo and Pietro, who were walking towards the hut from the hotel. Pietro seemed to treat Carlo with a deference which a captor does not usually show to his prisoner. As soon as they noticed Mr. Byker, Pietro clutched Carlo by the collar, making a pretence of dragging him along.

They motioned to Mr. Byker to enter the hut, where they all sat upon the ground, and Pietro began a rather long speech. When he had finished, Carlo communicated its substance in English, which was to this effect :

'The brigands, of whom Pietro was the chief, had been very unfortunate and unhappy for some time; few persons had visited Nicata who yielded adequate ransoms, and they now looked to the rich Englishmen who had last arrived to compensate them for their trouble and disappointments. Unemployed brigands,' he added, 'were apt to become exacting, and these were very angry owing to the trick played upon them

by you in leaving a box containing things which had made them and their wives and children so ill that they thought they would all die.'

'What does he mean?' interrupted Mr. Byker. 'I never heard of this before; besides, I have never given these people anything. How, then, can I have made them ill?'

'Oh,' replied Carlo, 'perhaps you have forgotten your medicine-chest, which Pietro says he picked up! It seems that he and the others have taken a good deal of its contents, and have suffered for doing so. They think that you intended to let them find the chest and poison themselves by taking what was in it.'

'I sincerely wish they had never got the chest! I am sure I was most anxious to find it, as it contained plenty of medicine for my master. You must remember how we looked for it everywhere. Please tell him so.'

Carlo said something in Italian, and then he continued in English:

'He won't believe what I have told him.

However, it is no use saying anything more about that. You may like to hear what his conditions are for letting you go. He says, as you are an English millionaire, that you can pay a large sum for ransom, and that, till you have arranged for his receiving ten thousand pounds at a place in Catania which he will appoint, he will keep you and your clerk in custody, and torture you till you pay.'

'Me a millionaire!' exclaimed Mr. Byker. 'I am only a poor clerk; he has made a mistake; it's my master who has got all the money.'

'Surely, Mr. Argoll,' said Carlo, in a slightly sneering tone, 'your name is entered in the book at the hotel, and Pietro has seen it there. However, I will tell him what you say.'

After a few minutes' talk between Pietro and Carlo, the latter continued in English:

'He says he cannot tell which of you is the millionaire, but he is determined to get the ransom, or else you will have to take the consequences. He threatens to punish me,

too, unless you grant his terms. The only advantage I am to have is being killed last.'

'But what can he mean about killing?' was the question which Mr. Byker put, in real trepidation, and with the remembrance vividly brought to his mind of all he had read concerning Hadgi Stavros.

Carlo replied: 'He will not kill you unless you refuse to make the arrangements I have suggested; he says also that you can get as much money as you may require from the bankers in Catania.'

This last remark staggered Mr. Byker; he could not understand how Pietro had acquired this knowledge, and he was more than ever afraid of him.

'Please ask him,' he said in a pleading tone, 'to give me time and let me talk to my master at the hotel. I really don't know what to do;' and then he ejaculated in a half whisper, 'O my God, this is awful! My poor mother! How she will suffer when she hears of this!'

Carlo again spoke to Pietro, who rose

from the ground and began to move off, and Carlo said to Mr. Byker:

'He will give you time, as you ask for it; but he will not allow you to see the gentleman whom you call your master. He is certain that one of you must be able to do what he asks. Till you write the necessary papers ordering the money to be paid to him by the bankers in Catania he will draw three teeth out of each of you every day—one in the morning before breakfast, one before dinner, and one before going to bed. He says that he won't begin till to-morrow morning, and he now insists upon my going to the hotel to interpret what he says to your clerk. Of course, I am very sorry to have to say anything so unpleasant, but as I am a prisoner like you, I must do what he tells me, else he will cut my throat. I am sure I should not mind that so much as having one of my teeth drawn. I am told the pain is dreadful.'

Mr. Byker was left alone in the hut; two brigands remained on guard outside. A little later in the day one of them brought him

some meat, bread, and a bottle of wine. This was his dinner. He had taken no food since the previous night, and he was now glad to eat a piece of meat and bread and to drink some wine. Then he lay down and bitterly thought of the morrow.

Pietro did not go to Mr. Argoll; but Carlo had a talk with him that evening, in the course of which he said that his master was to be tortured by Pietro until he wrote the lines which would ensure ten thousand pounds being paid to him at Catania. Mr. Argoll did not wish Mr. Byker to be maltreated or mutilated, neither did he wish to part with so large an amount of money. He, too, wished to gain time. He avowed to Carlo who he was, and the latter said that the brigand would not accept his statement, adding that when he told Pietro what Mr. Byker said in the morning, Pietro replied he would postpone drawing out their teeth, provided that one of them wrote the necessary document. Mr. Argoll urged, what was perfectly true, that he had been so weakened by his illness as to be scarcely able to use a pen, and that

he had great difficulty in signing his name to the letter which Mr. Byker wrote when the messenger came from Catania with the request for an immediate answer to a despatch. He also said that, if Mr. Byker were brought to him on the following day, he would be able to act as his amanuensis. Carlo thought at first of volunteering, and then he reflected that he could not write English half so well as he spoke it, and that a document in his handwriting might excite suspicion when presented to the bankers. Accordingly he was prepared to bring Mr. Byker and Mr. Argoll together on the following morning, and he sent a message to that effect to Pietro. The latter was delighted at the prospect of getting his twenty-five thousand lire so soon and so easily, and there was much feasting and rejoicing in Nicata that evening on the good news being circulated that the rich Englishmen had consented to pay a very large ransom.

Mr. Byker could not sleep. He was not a coward, but the prospect of having a sound tooth drawn in the morning before breakfast,

and of other tortures in the future, was enough to appal and unnerve him. He was not fertile in expedients, and he could not think of any means for getting out of the difficulty, till the thoughts which passed through his mind in the morning whilst gazing on the view now recurred, and he said to himself: 'If I could but get to the church down there, I might persuade the priest to send a message to the bankers in Catania, and they would arrange to rescue us.' He never took into consideration that when he reached the church he would have as much difficulty in explaining what he wanted as the priest would have in understanding him. In truth, some vague recollections of his schoolboy lessons, to the effect that in Roman Catholic countries churches were regarded as sanctuaries, caused him to think that he would be safe from the brigands in the church at Nicata. He was not apprehensive about his master, knowing well that, rather than suffer the slightest physical pain, he would sign anything.

All night his mind was a prey to conflict-

ing and harrowing ideas. He asked himself whether it would be wise to try and escape, as it might happen that his fate would be the worse when recaptured. He shuddered to think of his hair being torn out by the roots, of his fingers and toes being cut off in succession, of his nose and ears being cut off afterwards. After a restless and agonizing night, he rose at daybreak, gently opened the door of the hut, peeped cautiously out, and was relieved not to see any sign of the two brigands who had acted as his guards. He stepped out and looked on all sides without perceiving any trace of them. He did not know that they were sleeping soundly in the company of their families, after a night spent in carousing and rejoicing over the booty which the two Englishmen would yield.

Mr. Byker looked again with eager eyes upon the scene which had attracted him the preceding day. In the distance, but not far off, to all appearance, stood the village church. 'Oh, if I could but reach it!' he exclaimed; and then he began to descend the slope leading to the bottom of the valley. He slowly

clambered up the opposite slope, reached the top, and, though somewhat exhausted by his exertion and his fears, breathed more freely and felt in better heart.

Whilst Mr. Byker was moving off, Carlo and Pietro were approaching the hut with a view to take him back to the *Hôtel des Étrangers*, in order that he might act as amanuensis to Mr. Argoll. They congratulated each other upon the near approach of a settlement which would make them both happy. On reaching the hut, and entering it, they were surprised to find it deserted; then, as they came out, they saw Mr. Byker at the top of the slope on the opposite side of the valley. He had just got there, and he was pausing to take breath. Carlo called to him in English, 'Come back; it's all right.' He heard the words, but he was resolved not to return. Indeed, he was terror-stricken at being discovered, so he continued his flight in the direction of the church.

Pietro and Carlo rushed after Mr. Byker. Both could easily outstrip him in running.

A City clerk, who has passed middle-age, is seldom fleet of foot or sound in wind. Pietro gained upon him rapidly; Carlo was not far behind. He was really anxious to shield Mr. Byker from harm; his life had become most dear to him, and he kept shouting, 'Stop, stop; you will hurt yourself!'—but the louder he shouted the more terrified grew Mr. Byker, and the faster did he run. With blank dismay Carlo saw him proceed in the path which led direct to the *Inferno*. Again he shouted, 'Turn aside at once, or you will kill yourself!' and then he called to Pietro in Italian, 'Do not let him go farther, or we are all lost!' Pietro increased his pace, and got close to Mr. Byker just as he had reached the brink. Making a desperate effort, Pietro succeeded in clutching hold of him as he was about to slip over. Mr. Byker would have been drawn back had he not made an almost superhuman effort and leaped forward, dragging his pursuer after him. Pietro made a vigorous attempt to disengage and save himself, but in vain. They went over the brink together, and rolled down the slope. Pietro,

knowing his danger, made convulsive clutches at the stones on the way without arresting his descent. A small column of white smoke rose in the air as both of them disappeared for ever.

END OF VOL. II.

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